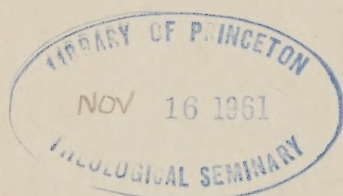
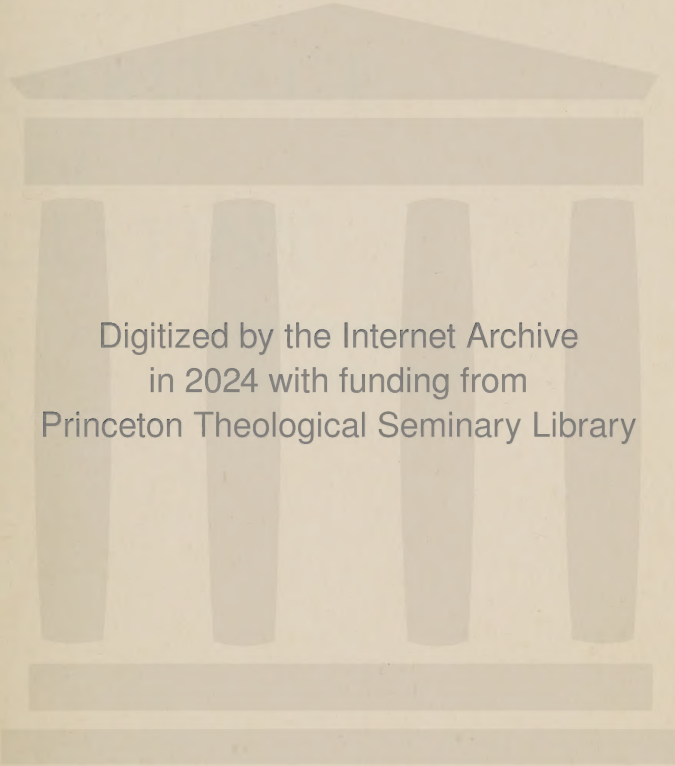


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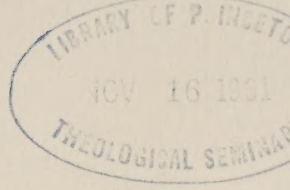




HERITAGE  
*and*  
DESTINY

*An American Religious  
Movement Looks Ahead*





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*An American Religious  
Movement Looks Ahead*

By Winfred E. Garrison

1961

The Bethany Press



St. Louis, Missouri



HERITAGE

and

DESTINY

The American Religion

William L. Shaw

by William L. Shaw

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## Preface

PAUL TILlich recently described the predicament of Western man in our period as "loss of the dimension of depth." The hot pursuit of unexamined goals leaves little time for a person to ask from whence he came and where he is going. The same formula applies to a civilization, a nation, or a religious body. Only a few seers manage to survey the current scene in the perspective of history and in deliberate awareness of the most cherished goals. W. E. Garrison is the rare combination of disciplined historian, moral philosopher, and wise prophet who can encompass the past, the present, and the future of the Christian Churches in one observation. His long productive life spans a substantial portion of history of Disciples of Christ, and his professional career as a first-class historian lends the critical quality essential to analysis and creative proposals. He is able to set this religious movement in the wider context of a comprehensive world view.

The Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) have no monopoly on ignorance of the past and uncertainty with regard to the future. Nevertheless we can claim a major portion of both among some of the leaders of our movement, as well as among the rank and file. We have tended to either puff our founding fathers or dismiss them with less than justice. We have ignored certain tendencies which would have been obvious to the casual glance of a social scientist interested in the movement as a social phenomenon. We have defined our goals in terms of the obvious and immediate while neglecting the deep and distant objectives. We have exemplified the characteristic

mentioned by George Santayana, who observed that Americans, when they lose their way, tend to redouble their efforts.

The new interest in heritage and destiny described in this book is both wholesome and urgent. It is most fortunate that the one person in our fellowship most able to arouse our thought on these things has set forth his reflections and opinions in such an attractive and systematic manner. He reminds us that our heritage is from Peter on the day of Pentecost, from the Renaissance and the Reformation, as well as from Stone at Cane Ridge and Campbell at Brush Run. He warns us that our goals must be proximate as well as ultimate. He calls us all to face this time of decision with clear heads and ready hands as well as warm hearts.

There is a strange power which derives from reflection as a prologue to action. This time of pondering not only marshals relevant facts and promotes sound judgment, but it strengthens the will and invites the power to perform. As we gain insight into our predicament, we are forced to ask the right questions which, by the grace of God, may elicit the right answers. The noble witness of our fathers will not become operative unless we can rethink our situation in the same bold and creative fashion which prompted them to become prophets in the American wilderness. This is indeed a significant decade of decision as well as a season of sesquicentennials.

The great unsolved problems of our movement command the best minds we can produce. Campbell brought a great idea of Christian reunion to America, but our achievements in this field have been modest. We have honored learning, but our millions of members have been less creative in developing a unique and widely respected approach to higher education than have the few thousands of Quakers. We have given honor to the untrammelled human spirit, but we have been shy on the development of poets, musicians, playwrights, and painters who could give witness to that free spirit. We have contributed our share of great preachers and scholars, but we have not surpassed other American religious bodies to any obvious and remarkable extent. The time has come for us to realize the latent possibilities of the ideas, plans, and principles which brought us into existence as a force in American Christianity.



As history goes, 150 years is a short time. Perhaps this period of preparation is the forty years in the wilderness which precedes the conquest of Canaan. There is the definite possibility, however, that the movement has settled into the comfortable pattern of a respectable denomination and has, therefore, lost its power. A third and still more likely possibility such as this volume sets forth depends on how clearly the leaders of the Christian Churches can define their goals and marshall their resources. This decade of decision can have bearing on the future of all American Christianity as well as on the destiny of this people.

The loss of identity with the secular order is characteristic of the Protestant church in our time. The relations between the church of the Puritans and the philosophy, politics, and economics of New England were vital and operative. The public schools were once a primary concern of the Protestant faith as the heroic work of Alexander Campbell toward public education testifies. Individualism and capitalism are tied up with Calvin and his Genevan experiment. The Christian Churches have a splendid opportunity to aid in the recovery of this vital relationship. Stone's Kentucky revival and Campbell's influence on the social order belong to the concerns of a secular social scientist as well as to the interests of a church historian.

The goals of Disciples of Christ must give attention to the goals of America and Western civilization since all are involved in each other to some extent. Vachel Lindsay came close to the problem when he wrote of Campbell,

Let a thousand prophets have their due.  
Let each have his boat in the sky.  
But you were born for his secular millennium  
With the old Kentucky forest blooming like Heaven,  
And the redbirds flying high.<sup>1</sup>

PERRY E. GRESHAM

President, Bethany College and

President, International Convention of Christian Churches  
(Disciples of Christ)

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<sup>1</sup>From "Alexander Campbell" in *Collected Poems*, by Vachel Lindsay. Copyright 1925 by The Macmillan Company. Used with permission.

## *Foreword*

FROM AS FAR BACK as I can remember—and that is now quite a little while—I have heard ardent patriots extol “our American heritage” and give solemn warning of the consequences of surrendering any part of it, and earnest Disciples of Christ with equal zeal plead for strict maintenance of “our historic position.” In recent years the latter have more often substituted the phrase, “our heritage from our fathers,” but with no essential change in meaning.

I sympathize with both of these exhortations. For all intelligent and well-meaning Americans, the American heritage is of incalculable value. It is this which has “made and preserved us a nation,” and has given us as citizens the blessings of liberty and of boundless opportunity. The heritage of Disciples of Christ from those whom they call “the fathers” of their movement is likewise a precious possession in the eyes of all who believe that the religious movement to which they have given their allegiance has an honorable past, a promising present, and a lively hope for even greater future usefulness.

Heritages and historic positions help us know our location on the vast terrain of history. Even if we do not stand exactly upon the points they indicate, we use these points to serve as base lines and meridians for our survey of the field in reckoning where we do stand. They challenge us to admiration and emulation of those fathers—whether in civil government or religious affairs—whose adventurous spirits moved them to explore beyond the safe limits of the already known and the generally accepted.

We must consider what kind of men these men must have been to challenge so much of the tradition they had received from their fathers and to assume the risks of thinking freely and acting boldly to meet the new conditions of their day. When we do this, we cannot escape the troubling thought that following steadily the paths they opened up, thinking no other than the thoughts they thought and adhering meticulously to the tradition that they established is far from being the kind of men they were. My reverence for these civic and religious leaders quickens my concern to learn what they thought and did in the situations in which they found themselves a century and a half ago, but still more does it stir my mind to wonder what they would think and do in the present situation if they were here now. They were nonconformists and revolutionaries then. Would they be docile conformists now? When their courageous advances in spite of the drag of custom and tradition had won them standing ground on a higher level, perhaps they thought that this was a permanent plateau of excellence beyond which no further advance was possible. If they were living now, would they think that what they considered the ultimate a century and a half ago is still the ultimate? Did they pass on to their successors only the specific results of their bold advance, or did they also bequeath to them the adventurous spirit that made the advance possible?

So it seems worth while not just to talk in terms of filial piety about our duty to walk only in the paths opened up by the fathers and to go no farther than they went, but to inquire specifically about two things: Just what is the heritage that our fathers received from their fathers and what did they do with it before transmitting it to us? What should be our attitude toward receiving this heritage and possibly changing it by addition or subtraction before transmitting it to our spiritual heirs and assigns? These are the two questions that are discussed in these pages.

This book has been developed from four Centennial Lectures delivered at The College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, in November, 1960. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to President Riley B. Montgomery for the invitation, and to the faculty and students of that institution for the warmth



of their reception and the intelligent liveliness of the hour-long after-luncheon discussions which followed the lectures. My appreciation of their response does not necessarily imply their unanimous agreement with everything I said. If difference of opinion is what makes horse-racing interesting—a sentiment well understood in the Bluegrass—still more does it make lecturing to students both interesting and rewarding for all concerned.

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HERITAGE  
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*An American Religious  
Movement Looks Ahead*



# I

## *The Nature of Heritages*

THE CONCEPT OF A "Decade of Decision"—the slogan of Disciples of Christ for the 1960's—implies the underlying concept of an ongoing movement which has reached a fork in the road. What is the goal toward which they press? Or, if they think they already know that, which is the path that leads toward that goal? It is true that there are decisions to be made every year, every day. But when the issue is a vital one, involving many factors and many people, a decade is perhaps not too much time to allot to it. The Church in the past has made some great decisions that took longer than that. Since the necessity for a choice presses upon us, procrastination is culpable carelessness. Since the issues are momentous and not simple, they demand deliberate speed.

We stand—as men always do—at the point of transition between a history and a destiny. The forward march must be plotted with some awareness of the road over which we have come. Otherwise we may find ourselves marching around in circles with an illusion of progress. An interest in the past merely for the sake of the past is sterile antiquarianism. However, to move into the future without some understanding of the past, and so without the wisdom taught by experience, is to move blindly. The Apostle Paul did not mean to recommend that course when he said that he pressed forward "forgetting the things that are behind." Of course, he did not mean that he

was really forgetting the past. He was, in fact, constantly remembering past events. Christianity is a historical religion. It is based upon certain mighty works of God which are now, and were in Paul's time, events in the past. If Christianity had no past, it would have no future. Moreover, Paul remembered some past events that were later than the life and death of Jesus and regarded them as highly significant. He remembered what he had heard about Pentecost and the earliest church in Jerusalem, and about the work of Peter and other disciples as the gospel began to spread. He remembered his own observations and experiences, his activities as a persecutor of the followers of Christ, the killing of Stephen, his own conversion, his conference with the leaders in Jerusalem, and his missionary journeys in Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. These things are all within the area of what we now call church history. Paul remembered them, and so must we. When he said that he forgot them, what he undoubtedly meant was that he did not linger upon either the shame or the satisfaction that his memories might evoke, but that he learned what he could from them for the guidance of his future course, and then pressed on with his work toward the goal which the past had revealed to him and with the wisdom that the knowledge of this past had given him. The past had given him his orientation toward the future, and toward that future he pressed on.

The story of Christianity has lengthened vastly since Paul's day. There is more of it to forget, as he forgot, and more to remember as he remembered. Some of it must be remembered with shame, some with pride and satisfaction, but it all has meaning and is a help in charting the road ahead. This is true of the church as a whole, and of each particular segment of it or movement within it. Disciples of Christ did well to precede their "Decade of Decision" by a period in which much emphasis has been laid upon their heritage. Their history has a wealth of wisdom, warning, and inspiration for them, if they will understand and utilize it.

In the earliest phase of their life and work and for many years thereafter, Disciples of Christ had little concern for history. It was enough for them that they were making history—and they did make it. As for the centuries between the close of the



apostolic age and the writing of the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* and the *Declaration and Address*, the commonest view was that these were a barren waste, the record of which could be briefly summarized as the story of apostasy from revealed truth and from the pattern of the New Testament Church. In his early youth Alexander Campbell was indeed an avid reader of church history, and once, when a critic charged that some proposition of his was "not new," he said that he would be poor indeed if he had not learned much from Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and many others who had gone before him. This statement seems to have made little impression on his associates and immediate successors. The concept of a heritage from, or even through, the Christian centuries remained vague and unimportant to those who boasted that they would "read the New Testament as though no one had ever read it before." And indeed the determination to escape entanglement in theological and ecclesiastical tradition by going back to the original sources was the strength of their movement.

Beginning in the 1890's some Disciples began to be interested both in general church history and in their own history. The first serious effort in this history was G. W. Longan's *Origin of the Disciples of Christ*, elicited by a Baptist polemic under the same title which had purported to prove that Disciples were "an offshoot of Sandemanianism." The Baptist writer described his own work as "a contribution to the centennial anniversary of the birth of Alexander Campbell" (1888)—an anniversary to which it seems no Disciple had paid any attention. B. B. Tyler, whose many gifts did not include any considerable competence as a historian, wrote a history of Disciples for inclusion in a series on the American denominations; and his son-in-law, Errett Gates, produced the first work in that field by a man competently trained in historical method. Meanwhile, W. T. Moore had written his monumental—and largely reminiscent and autobiographical—*A Comprehensive History of the Disciples of Christ*. Herbert L. Willett, though he did not write a book on the subject, taught the first academic course ever given in the history of Disciples when he was dean of the Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I was a member of his class while preparing for my Ph.D., which, I have reason to believe, was the first Ph.D. in church history ever conferred on anybody in America.

After these beginnings the interest in Disciple history deepened and widened, and many well-trained men have contributed to its literature.

The organization of the Disciples of Christ Historical Society marked a new epoch both in general interest in this field and in the provision of resources for study. The beginnings of the Society were feeble and inconspicuous. I cannot pass over this phase without paying a tribute of gratitude to the generosity of Culver-Stockton College which for more than ten years gave the Society quarters in one of its buildings and half of the time of its librarian, and to the skill and devotion of Claude Spencer, who was that librarian and who was then and is now the curator of the Society's archives and collections. The moving of the Society's headquarters to Nashville opened a new chapter in its development and service, and the erection and occupancy of its magnificent Thomas W. Phillips Memorial building was an event so decisive that it can be said to have opened a whole new volume, if not in our history, at least in the history of our history.

To this it must be added that the publication policy of the Bethany Press, under the direction of the history-conscious president of the Christian Board of Publication, Dr. Wilbur Cramblet, has given an immense amount of encouragement both to the writers and to the readers of our history.

All these things together, in conjunction with other influences which need not now be detailed, have produced among thoughtful Disciples of Christ a quickened awareness and appreciation of their own past. To intensify their loyalty to the essential principles of the movement, many of our leaders have in recent years been stressing a more thorough knowledge of our heritage as Disciples and a better understanding of it. It is precisely for this reason that I have chosen to organize my thought in these chapters around the concepts of "Heritage" and "Destiny."

Heritage and Destiny—here are two richly comprehensive words applicable to the whole human story. The first looks toward the past—a past that stretches back to such remote beginnings that we cannot define or envisage its origins. The second looks forward to a future whose farther reaches similarly disappear at the vanishing point of time's perspective. The meet-

ing point of these two is the present. It is an unprofitable subtlety to say that the present is only the line of transition from past to future, and that, since a line has theoretically no width, the present does not exist.

In our thinking together about the heritage and destiny of Disciples of Christ, I suggest in the interest of practicality that we shorten the scope of these two terms and broaden that of the present. We need not be archeological in regard to heritage, or eschatological with reference to destiny, or so rigidly geometrical as to think of the present as a term without actual content. We know that this living generation, inventive and exploratory as it is, inherited a vast body of ideas from the past. This heritage includes knowledge of our world, its social and political institutions, patterns of thought and behavior, achievements in art, industry and invention, moral ideals, and religious concepts, practices and organizations. This living generation, which we can call the present, has done things with this heritage, so that what it passes on to succeeding generations will not be identical with what it received. These changes, already made or in the making by this generation, will play their part in determining the cultures and civilizations of the future. The end result of this whole process of transmission, alteration, and addition will be the realization of a destiny.

It is possible, though in this context it is not probable, that the terms "heritage" and "destiny" might imply such a degree of determinism in the historical process that human freedom would be eliminated; and if freedom goes, then responsibility goes with it. It is said by some that all the thoughts and acts of men are as rigidly determined by the compulsive forces of heredity and environment as the movement of a golf ball is determined by the force and direction of the swing, the weight and facial angle of the club, the weight and elasticity of the ball, the resistance of the air, and the physical condition of the terrain on which the ball falls. The ball itself has no choice in the matter. It is what it is because it was made that way; that is heredity. And it does what it does and stops where it stops because the external forces applied to that kind of ball and the resistances encountered by it (these are environment) could not produce any other result. The end result would be the ball's "destiny" so far as that stroke is concerned.



Any suggestion that this is a true analogy to the human situation is hereby completely repudiated. More will be said of that later. We do have a heritage; we live and work in an environment; and we move toward a destiny. But, as I shall presently be arguing at some length, our heritage does not impose upon us a pattern which we are either physically compelled or morally bound to follow. Our environment is in considerable degree subject to choices and changes that are within our power to effect. Our destiny is not something predestined and foreordained for us but is something for the determining of which we at least share the responsibility.

Before we can with any profit discuss destiny—whether a man's personal destiny, or that of a religious body, or that of our civilization and the world as a whole—some consideration must be given to the nature and meaning of heritage and to the different kinds of heritages. This is the very pivot on which a great part of the argument of this book turns. If what is here said about the varieties of heritages is not understood and fairly well agreed to, nothing that may be said hereafter about heritage and destiny will make much sense.

The definition is simple enough. A heritage is something that is inherited. Webster says the word means the same as "inheritance," but that the shorter form is "elevated or poetical." In speaking of the heritage of Disciples of Christ there is no intention of being poetical, but the theme is of importance, and so may be classed as "elevated." Whichever form of the word is used, it means something that is acquired not by one's own efforts but by transmission freely from its former possessor who is no longer in a position to retain and enjoy the possession of it. So much is common to all heritages, but there are different kinds. It is important to distinguish among these various kinds and to decide which kind it is that a religious body receives from those who founded and nourished it; specifically, what kind of heritage Disciples of Christ have received from their fathers.

First, there is the inheritance of a physical constitution. Every person has this kind of heritage. It comes directly from his parents, indirectly from his more remote ancestors. What it is, it is. The individual does not choose it, cannot refuse it, and cannot lose it. He can develop it or allow it to deteriorate. He

can modify his physical condition for better or for worse, but in any case the assets and liabilities of his physical inheritance are the base from which he must start, the capital with which he must begin business as a living organism, the handicap—favorable or unfavorable—with which he starts the race of life. It is a commonplace of biology and perhaps of some other sciences that heredity and environment are the determining factors in any organism's development. When it comes to man, this formula may be a little too simple to explain the complex processes involved in the development of individual personalities and the social order. There may be—at this point I do not say that there is but I say only that it is conceivable that there may be—another factor which enables man to modify or select his environment. In any case, however, his inherited physical constitution is a “given” element, a “constant” in all his subsequent calculations.

Second, there is the heritage of property, more commonly and prosaically called an inheritance. You may have one, or you may not. If your parents or a rich uncle or a benevolent stranger name you as the heir to a piece of real estate or a going business, you can either take it or leave it. Most people take it. But if you do take it, you must take the liabilities along with the assets. If the property has a mortgage on it, you cannot take the title to the real estate but refuse the mortgage. If the business as a going concern has some bills payable, the happy heirs cannot say that they will leave the bills payable for someone else and will take only the bills receivable and the inventory. With this kind of inheritance, credits and debits go together. It is both or neither. But even if one accepts both, one is under no legal or moral obligation to keep both. If the heir inherits a house that does not meet his requirements, he does not have to live in it. He can sell it, or give it away, or abandon it. In any case the mortgage, if there is one, remains an inescapable liability diminishing by so much the value of the estate, no matter into whose possession it comes. It may or may not be true that

The evil that men do lives after them,

The good is oft interred with their bones

but it is certainly true that the debts that men incur live after them in the form of charges against whatever inheritance they

may leave to their heirs. Here we are dealing only with the kind of heritage that has monetary value and the title to which is transmissible by legal process.

Third, every person inherits the general culture (taking the word in the wide sense in which anthropologists use it) of his own time and place. This is almost as inevitable and inescapable as an inheritance of blue eyes or red hair. You were born in twentieth-century America, not in twentieth-century B.C. Egypt or first-century Rome. Your world is a world of railroads, airplanes, telephones, radio and TV, daily papers with news of the world almost up to the minute, and atomic bombs. Yours is not a world of ox carts and chariots, spear-and-battle-ax warfare, relays of couriers bringing month-old news from places not a thousand miles away, and throngs of white household slaves captured in the latest successful raid on a neighboring country. Your world has a social and economic structure, and a broad base of customs, practices, and institutions which form the environment into which you were born. These are your social heritage. They are the inescapable, or almost inescapable, setting of your life. It is theoretically possible to "get away from it all" by going to an island in the South Seas, as Gauguin went from Paris to Tahiti. Islands of uncorrupted primitive simplicity have become harder to find in the last fifty years but, even if one were found, the finder could not avoid taking with him into his voluntary exile the memory of what he had left behind and the inner consequences of its impact upon him. The mind of the rebel is always colored by the character of that against which he rebels, as the formulations of orthodoxy are always determined by the nature of the heresies which they oppose. In actual practice, one cannot get away from this general social heritage of one's own time and place. Even so, it cannot be said that one is in bondage to it. The very fact that the social and cultural environment of today differs widely from that of a century or ten centuries ago is evidence that the general social and cultural heritage is not entirely inflexible and unalterable. We know it can be changed because it has been changed. Such changes are slow, gradual, often unforeseen and unintended, always the work of many minds. For any given generation, the cultural heritage of that time is less imperative in compelling



conformity to its patterns of thought and behavior than it is in restricting advance to better ones because of the limited resources it provides for such advance. Progress is possible only by utilizing the accumulated and transmitted cultural resources of the past plus such relatively small increment as one man or any one generation can add to the inherited store. Therefore progress is gradual, but also possible.

Fourth, there is a heritage of ideas and of programs of action for their dissemination. Here we come to the kind of heritage with which we are really most concerned. The ideas and practices of religion fall within this category. Here we enter the area of free choice. It is true that most children imitate and follow the religious ideas and practices of their parents and of the religious community in which they are reared. But they are not compelled to do so. This is true also of some other than religious ideas that are inherited, but it is especially true in religion. Disciples of Christ who are unduly timid about putting to the test their inherited ideas may be encouraged to greater boldness by remembering that Alexander Campbell's grandfather was a Roman Catholic who became an Episcopalian; his father became a Presbyterian; and he, born Presbyterian, fathered a new movement which was something else. What happened to the heritage? Much was retained, but also much was rejected. This is a pivotal concept. A heritage of ideas does not have to be accepted willy-nilly in a block, like the physical traits inherited from one's ancestors. It does not have to be accepted or rejected as a whole, like the assets and liabilities of a grocery store or the title and the mortgage on a piece of real estate. It does not make such tremendous impact upon individuals or have such high resistance to change by the action of individuals as does the broad social and cultural heritage of a nation or a generation. It can be accepted selectively. Judgment upon ideas is the peculiar province of intelligent individuals, and acceptance or rejection of them according to the dictates of such judgments is the characteristic function of free men. Ideas, whether inherited or not, must be accepted or rejected on the basis of a critical selectivity if there is to be any progress toward fuller knowledge of the truth. There must also be the concurrence of many individual judgments in what thus becomes a harmoni-

ous social judgment. Such studied agreement, as distinguished from the purely imitative like-mindedness of a bunch of sheep or a human mob, is generally essential to the effective implementation of a carefully examined idea that has been accepted as truth.

Having made a distinction between the general cultural heritage and a heritage of specific ideas, I must add that the boundary between these two classes is indistinct. There are many items which could be put into either category or both, and the latter might be considered a subclass within the former. It is never possible to make a perfectly rigid classification of phenomena as vital and complex as those of the ongoing processes of life and thought. One has a right to be suspicious of any schematization which seems simpler than the facts themselves. The main point in this classification of the kinds of heritages is to make clear the distinction between those which are imposed upon the recipient and those which are offered for acceptance or rejection subject to his own judgment.

We will not learn from our fathers what we may learn from them if we either follow them as sheep or camels follow their leader, saying what they said and believing exactly what they believed, or, at the other extreme, if we are possessed by such a mania of independence that we will listen to no voice from the past and learn from no experience but our own. We can profit by our inheritance from our fathers only as we exercise a wise selective receptivity toward the tradition they have left for us, even as they did toward that which they inherited from their fathers. The freedom which they exercised toward their heritage is part of our heritage from them. We must profit by their mistakes as well as their successes, and must avoid the blind alleys they ran into while we follow the roads they opened up. I shall have occasion to repeat this point about the necessity for a discriminating and selective acceptance of a heritage of ideas, perhaps with tedious reiteration, for it is fundamental to my thinking on this subject.

It may serve to clarify further the nature of heritages of culture and ideas, and the extent and limits of the obligations which they impose upon those who are the heirs to them, if we consider how these principles apply in the field of our national life,

for the moment leaving religion out of the account so far as possible. What did the founding fathers of the American republic inherit from the centuries of political and social life before their time? How much of this heritage did they accept and incorporate into their own programs of thought and action? How much did they reject as either false or inapplicable in their time? What new things did they add which, in turn, entered into the heritage transmitted to those who came after them—that is, to us?

Perhaps the oldest and the most enduring item in this secular heritage was the idea of an organized society with a government to restrain or coerce some of the acts of individuals. This was more than an idea. It was a settled habit of by far the greater part of the human race. The so-called primitive peoples do not simply huddle together for mutual protection. Their groupings have structure, often exceedingly intricate structure, with authority and the means of enforcing it. The locus of that authority may be the tribal chief, or the council of old men, or the consensus of the tribe. The purpose, real or alleged, of all such recognitions of authority in a pattern of government and social organization is to promote the welfare of the entire group, and their justification is found in the fact that they do so. In many historical situations, especially when the units have become large and the social stratification has acquired the sanction of ancient custom, the actual operation of government has not been for the promotion of the welfare of all but to guard the interests of a ruling minority, which in some cases may be even a minority of one. In spite of a shameful record of this kind of abuse of authority, government goes on, though many governments have collapsed. It goes on because almost any government is better than none, and because those who are sufficiently dissatisfied and sufficiently strong to overthrow any particular regime are sure they can set up a better one either for their own benefit or for the general welfare. There have been hundreds of rebellions against governments, but only a few theoretical and doctrinaire anarchists have been rebels against government, both the idea and the concrete and continuing reality. Government therefore is one of the most fundamental items in the heritage which our revolutionary fathers received from their fathers. This is one of those things that are so obvious that they can easily escape



notice, but it is basic to all the rest.

Social stratification appeared early in the history of civilization. In some groups the superior status and authority of the old men has been the most conspicuous fact in the social structure, but that is not a stratification, for old age is a quality that everyone acquires if he lives long enough. Aristocracy of birth seems to be the decisive factor in a real stratification of society. In some places it is still an important consideration in the governmental organization. Great Britain has its House of Lords. If an aristocrat derives his favored status from the fact that he has aristocratic ancestors, the question naturally arises as to how these ancestors became aristocrats. This does not bear too close a scrutiny if one wishes to keep one's faith in the superiority of "blue blood." Historical research often discloses that the progenitor of a "noble" line was an exceptionally brawny roughneck who effectively aided his feudal superior in his wars, or, in later times, that he was a successful brewer or manufacturer who had contributed generously to the sovereign's favorite charities. However this superior status was acquired, it remains a patent fact that the hereditary stratification of society into classes, as "nobles" and "commons," has a long history and was part of the heritage of every person who was to take part in the organization of a government in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Monarchy, as the preferred type of government, and almost the only type, was another item in the heritage. It might be an absolute monarchy, such as the Stuarts and the Bourbons claimed as their prerogative, or it might be a monarchy limited by the need of parliamentary concurrence, as in Great Britain after 1689. In either case, it was monarchy with a sovereign as the symbol of national unity. The monarchy and the social stratification just mentioned are so closely related that it is difficult to think of one without the other. The sovereign has the power to make nobles out of commoners, and he is himself on the top step of that ladder of social and governmental privilege, the lower rungs of which are occupied by the nobles in their respective degrees of dignity.

The idea of popular representation in the governmental process was far advanced in England at the time when those



who were to be the founding fathers of the American republic still considered themselves loyal subjects of the British king. English commoners had political rights. These rights were subject to many restraints and limitations, but they existed. The Commons had their representation in Parliament. This turned out to be an immensely important item in the political heritage. When it had been carried across the Atlantic to the British colonies which were in the act of becoming sovereign states in an indissoluble union, the adaptation of it to the new conditions seemed to require that each state receive or retain the right to determine the qualifications for voting in all elections within its boundaries, including national elections. There were some differences in the laws governing the exercise of the electoral franchise in the several states, but there was at first a rather general agreement that the right to vote should be limited to white, male, property owners. This was the form of the heritage of popular representation which the founding fathers accepted from their forebears and transmitted to the next generation.

Perhaps even more important than the heritage of these administrative and legislative institutions was that of the common law and the courts for its application and enforcement. There was trial by jury. There was the writ of habeas corpus. There was the whole apparatus of civil and criminal courts for the enforcement of common and statutory law and of equity, devised and administered for the protection of the life, liberty, and property of the individual citizen. The citizen, in England at least and to a less degree elsewhere, had been freed from the peril of arbitrary imprisonment, confiscation of property, or loss of life on the mere order of the sovereign or one of his representatives. It had taken a long process and many legal battles to achieve this result, but it had been attained in Great Britain by the latter part of the seventeenth century. Englishmen, whether in the home islands or in the colonies, could now appeal to the government, even if it was an unfriendly one, on the ground of their "rights as Englishmen." All this was part of the heritage of the men who became the founders of the American Republic.

They inherited also the concept of an established church—an idea that rested, but now somewhat precariously, upon the centuries-old concept, already exploded, that the political stability

and social cohesion of any state rested upon the homogeneity of its citizens' religion. England had found by experience that this was simply not true, and that the health of the body politic was, in fact, much better when the dissenters were given leave to dissent and to propagate their opinions in any way they pleased than when they were subjected to imprisonment and other forms of persecution in a futile effort to make them conform to the form of religion authorized by act of Parliament. So, though many social and civil disabilities for dissenters remained after 1689, the dissenters could at least exist in peace and safety. The established church, however, remained established. It was still the Church of England, though increasing numbers of Englishmen belonged to other churches. Part of the cultural and political heritage of America's founding fathers was this pattern of religious organization. It had, in somewhat different forms, been dominant in Western Europe since the latter part of the fourth century. It furnished the theoretical basis for all the religious persecution by the Catholic Church from the fourth century until now, and of the principal Protestant state churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since the American fathers derived their cultural tradition chiefly from England, which had already become relatively tolerant, it may be said that the practice of religious persecution was no part of their living heritage. However, the plan of having one preferred religion recognized by law as the nation's church, under the shadow of whose prestige and pomp all other churches might do the best they could as "dissenters," was very definitely a part of their immediate and living heritage. There was not a Christian country in the world that did not have its established church. Nine of the thirteen British colonies in America had their established churches right up to the brink of the Revolution, and some of them retained at least vestiges of these establishments for half a century longer.

The question as to what the founding fathers of America did with this total heritage is one that virtually answers itself in the mind of any moderately informed person. They accepted some parts of it and rejected other parts. The above enumeration of items in this heritage is incomplete, suggestive rather than exhaustive, but a quick glance through it will be a reminder

that their acceptance was critical and selective. What did they accept out of this wealth of inherited social and political experience?

Did they accept the idea of an organized society with a government structure? Certainly they accepted this. Revolutionists are not anarchists, and our Revolutionary fathers were not. They wanted a better government, not no-government. Moreover, they made explicit what had always been the implicit justification for government, that it existed to promote the general welfare of the governed.

Did they want popular representation? Yes, by all means. Here again they bettered their instruction. By broadening the base of representation and equalizing the status of all citizens as voters (except for that lingering property-ownership qualification), they took a long step in the direction of realizing the ideal that the governed should determine and control the government that governs them. The idea of bicameral legislative bodies, with one chamber a little less directly democratic than the other, was an imitation of, and an improvement upon, the British Parliament with its two houses, one of which was not democratic at all. The revised system of representation was intended to be democratic, but *demos*, even when women, non-whites and the propertyless were excluded, might still be too impetuous and uninstructed to exercise the franchise wisely. It was sincerely intended that government *of* the people should be truly government *for* the people; but that it should also be government *by* the people was a proposition which, in 1789 (and even a good deal later), seemed to require some checks and limits. It may be safely said, however, that the idea of popular representation in government, as a feature of the political heritage which had already developed in England far beyond its rudiments in Magna Charta, was accepted with enthusiasm and with the intent of going much farther in the direction already indicated.

Did they accept laws and courts? Of course. Our founding fathers accepted not only the general idea of having laws enacted by legislative bodies and courts to interpret and apply them, together with a clear distinction between the executive, legislative, and judicial powers, but also the general body of English



common law and court procedure. A layman in law would doubtless fall into errors of detail if a full statement were attempted as to the similarities and dissimilarities between the British and American legal systems. Fortunately no such extended statement is needed in this context. All that is necessary is to note that the general structure of the British juridical system was accepted, together with much of the specific content of English law, but accepted with such a sense of freedom and responsibility as to permit whatever changes and additions seemed advisable, including the addition of a vast and growing body of both federal and state legislation.

Other features of the ancient heritage in the governmental and social organization were rejected outright by our founding fathers. They would have none of the division of society into superior and inferior hereditary strata, with commons beneath and nobles of various degrees above. This remnant of medieval feudalism was swept away by a stroke of the pen. "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States. And no person holding any office of profit or trust under them shall, without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, emolument, office or title of any kind whatever from any king, prince or foreign state." (Art. I, Sec. 9) Nothing could be more definite than this repudiation of that whole system of social and political stratification which had been the most basic reality in public and private life all over Europe for a thousand years and more. It was a daring act to challenge that system, with all its antiquity and prestige, by the flat declaration that "All men are created equal."

How did they feel about monarchy? Out with it! There was a momentary suggestion that George Washington be made king. Very few took it seriously, he least of all. A government without a sovereign was not an absolute novelty. There had been experiments of that kind in classical antiquity. Rome between the kings and the emperors had been without a sovereign. Later there were Switzerland and the Dutch Republic. The Americans did not have to invent the idea of a republic, but the whole weight of experience and tradition was overwhelmingly against it. The British tradition was, of course, completely monarchical, broken only by the brief and disastrous period of the Common-



wealth in the middle of the seventeenth century. No factor in the heritage of our founding fathers was more firmly established than the institution of monarchy. The acceptance of it would be, more than anything else, the criterion of political orthodoxy. But they rejected it without a moment of hesitation.

Did they want an established church? Again the answer was, NO! This also was a sharp break with tradition and an abrupt rejection of a conspicuous part of the heritage. If there was little precedent for a nation without a sovereign, there was absolutely none for a predominantly Christian nation without an established church. It had been a political axiom since the fourth century that every autonomous governmental unit, from empire to duchy, must have its own church, established by law and defended against defection to and competition by any other form of religion. "Liberty of dissent" had been a fairly recent modification of this system in England, but the Church of England continued to enjoy the prestige and property that it had acquired in the days when it was the only church permitted to exist, while dissenters' "chapels" were allowed to do the best they could under the shadow of "The Church." The silence of the American Constitution registered a decision against the establishment of a national church, since the authority to establish one was not among the "delegated powers." The First Amendment put that decision into explicit words. The American people accepted and carried on the heritage of religion, of the Christian faith and of the church, in so far as each individual wished to do so; but the American government, backed by the will of a great majority of the people, declared that an established church was not an acceptable part of their heritage.

From the freedom with which the founding fathers of our republic treated their political heritage, rejecting what seemed to them outmoded or inappropriate under new conditions and accepting gratefully the much larger amount which they deemed fundamental or useful, it might be reasonably inferred that they would be pleased to see the succeeding generations of Americans use that same freedom in dealing with the heritage that comes down to them. Jefferson, indeed, put that inference into explicit words when he said that the nation at any given time has no right to bind the generations yet to come. Actually the gen-

erations that followed the founding fathers have perpetuated much of their heritage from the fathers, and have rejected or altered much—some think too much, some think too little. All would agree that there was much in that heritage that must be retained, and much that must be discarded. The process of selection, revision, and addition must still go on.

I hope it has not been a waste of time to take this rapid survey of the governmental heritage which our revolutionary and constitutional fathers received, and of the way in which they treated it and what they passed on to us, with a final hint that we must handle our heritage with fidelity as to the permanent and with freedom in determining what is permanent and what can be improved. The intention was to illustrate the nature of heritages of culture and ideas. We shall be turning now to consider our religious heritage, and with special reference to that of Disciples of Christ.

## II

### *Our Fathers' Heritage*

BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO describe the content of the heritage which our fathers received from their fathers and to consider what they did with it, we must first decide whom we mean when we, as Disciples of Christ, speak of our fathers.

The word "father" has one literal meaning and a great many figurative meanings. The latter are the more significant for our present purpose. A father, in the literal sense, is of course an individual's immediate male progenitor. From our fathers in the flesh, and equally from our mothers, we inherit life itself, our physical characteristics and doubtless some predispositions which, though obscurely physical in their basis, are psychological in their manifestations. It has been said that, if one would live to a healthy old age, one should carefully select one's parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. This physical heritage would still come to us if we were separated from our parents at birth, or if, like most of the animals, we never knew who our fathers were and had only brief association with our mothers. But the human family has come to have far greater significance than the mere transmission of life and physical characteristics. It is the most direct and immediate channel for the transmission of the cultural heritage. Thus it comes about that in most cases our literal and biological fathers (and mothers) are our fathers in a more exalted sense. Sometimes they are our best as well as our earliest teachers. They transmit to us the ideas and the

patterns of behavior received from their ancestors, with their own additions and revisions. They set standards of thought and conduct which are in some measure impressed upon us in early youth and which, if we are fortunate in our parentage, our own developing judgment finds admirable and worthy of our adoption as our own. Their exemplification of the higher values of life in their own personalities commends these values convincingly to our acceptance. It is because literal fatherhood has come to have these rich meanings for so many people through so many centuries that the term has gained its wider use by analogy.

So the word "fathers" has naturally acquired an aura of sanctity. It has come to mean our honored predecessors in almost any field, and especially the revered leaders of new movements or of new phases of old ones. The early Christian leaders and scholars from Clement of Rome to Augustine are called "the church fathers." Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox, and others are the Reformation fathers. The little band of exiles who migrated from Scrooby to Leyden and thence to Plymouth became our Pilgrim Fathers. Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and their associates are honored as the founding fathers of this nation. Wesley was the father of Methodism. Washington was the father of his country. My college fraternity had a founder, more than a century ago, whom we revere as Pater Knox. There is very ancient and exalted precedent for the use of the word "father" (or its equivalent) in this figurative sense. In Genesis 4:20-21 we may read of two brothers who were in the seventh generation from Adam in the line of Cain, that Jabal "was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle," and that Jubal "was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe."

Among Disciples of Christ, the four outstanding fathers were, of course, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone, and Walter Scott. These stand apart on an eminence as the founding fathers. However, after the lapse of a century and a half from the time of the beginnings, these cannot stand alone. The list of those entitled to be called "fathers" has become much longer. It would certainly include the mightiest of the contemporaries of the original four—men like "Raccoon" John Smith, John T. Johnson, Philip Fall, Jacob Creath,



Sr. There were also such men as Robert Richardson, Scott's pupil in boyhood and Alexander Campbell's lifelong associate and his biographer; William Hayden, Scott's "singing evangelist" in his decisive campaign in the Mahoning Association ("When I can't preach them in," Scott said, "Willie will sing them in"); and Dr. James T. Barclay, our first foreign missionary. Only a little later, and overlapping with these, were Moses E. Lard and Tolbert Fanning, two of our most stalwart and immovable conservatives; and Dr. L. L. Pinkerton, our first outspoken liberal; and Isaac Errett, our first great editor of a weekly religious paper and the man who, as much as any other if not more, influenced the second and third generations of Disciples to follow the broader rather than the narrower of the two paths, each of which represented one phase of the thought and action of the leaders in the first generation.

Even in this very brief listing of some of the men whom Disciples of Christ remember and revere as the fathers of their movement, it already appears that our heritage through and from them is not all of one uniform quality. It has seemed necessary to characterize some as "conservatives" and some as "liberals" even in this very early period. The fathers did not all hold the same views and transmit the same heritage of ideas. We would not escape this ambiguity in regard to the meaning and content of "our historic position" if we were to take Alexander Campbell alone as the supreme and sole authority—as, of course, nobody does—for he himself was sometimes conservative and sometimes liberal. The whole history of Disciples has been characterized by the coexistence of these two types of thought, both stemming from the same original impulse that gave birth to the movement, and both claiming to be faithful to its essential nature and aim. The result, naturally, has been controversy and division. More will have to be said later on that painful subject. At this point it is sufficient to note the fact of contention and division, and to say that every one of these conflicting claimants to the honor of being in the direct line of descent from the fathers can make a plausible case. Each one of them is perpetuating something that was in the teaching of the two Campbells, Scott, and Stone. This is true of such diverse groups as the Churches of Christ (who will not use

organs in worship or have societies as agencies for large-scale missionary and benevolent work), the nonco-operative churches (which, though they do not object to societies on principle, will not recognize the agencies that report to the International Convention because they consider the convention and all its agencies to be a den of radicals), and those of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) that have their names and statistics in the *Yearbook* and do co-operate through the convention and its agencies. These all have their roots in the same soil and grow from the same seed, though some of them seem to me not to have grasped the idea, which it is one purpose of this book to emphasize and illustrate, that the heir to a spiritual or cultural heritage may be more true to the spirit of his fathers by examining that heritage critically and rejecting part of it than by accepting and perpetuating it unchanged. Therefore, because these "conservatives" are of the same stock as the "progressives," their early representatives are entitled to a place among our fathers.

Hence the name of J. W. McGarvey cannot be omitted from our roll of heroes. He devoted his life to the interpretation of Scripture. For many years, at The College of the Bible, in Lexington, Kentucky, his was the most influential voice and, through his weekly page on "Biblical Criticism" in the *Christian Standard*, his was the most powerful pen defending the traditional view of the Bible against the newer modes of biblical study which he considered "destructive criticism."

The view of the Bible in which McGarvey believed with passionate sincerity, and which he endeavored to inculcate in the minds of his readers and in the successive generations of students for the ministry whom he taught during a period of nearly half a century, was one that had been held by Catholics and Protestants for hundreds of years. It was held by the earliest fathers of Disciples of Christ, though it was not distinctively theirs. If McGarvey claimed that he was faithfully transmitting one part of his heritage not only from our fathers but from the main line of Christian tradition that was centuries older, the claim was perfectly correct. This should establish the validity of his title as himself one of the fathers in the direct line of succession. It has, of course, no bearing on the more important question

as to whether the particular line of tradition that he represented was one of permanent validity or one that needed radical revision in the light of modern knowledge. It is not without significance that his doctrine is no longer taught in the school which he made the citadel for its defense and the arsenal for its promulgation or in any other first-class seminary, and that the paper which was his journalistic medium long ago broke its relation with the organized work of Disciples. He fought a valiant but losing fight in defense of an indefensible position, but he is entitled to gratitude and admiration as a living demonstration that a man with such radically conservative views could be such a noble and lovable Christian and could remain in fellowship with those whose understanding of the nature of the Bible was widely different from his—even while professionally he was denouncing them as little better than infidels.

If anyone else were listing the fathers of the latter half of the nineteenth century, he would doubtless mention J. H. Garrison at this point. Since he was my father, I can only hint at what I would say about him if he were not. As editor for forty years and editor emeritus and regular contributor for almost twenty more, he made *The Christian-Evangelist* the principal journalistic influence toward liberty and unity among Disciples themselves: liberty as against the dogmatic proscription of variant theological views, and unity in fellowship among all Christians and in the promotion of the brotherhood's common enterprises of evangelism, missionary expansion, and education. He was perhaps foremost among those who led Disciples to enter, at first hesitantly and then wholeheartedly, into the ecumenical movement in which they now seem so completely at home. There were many other able leaders in this movement, but his influence was conspicuous because of his seniority (he was an older man than Ainslie, Philputt, Powell, or any of the dozen others who could be named in this connection), his personal prestige, and the fact that he had a newspaper for the amplification of his voice.

By all modern standards, J. H. Garrison was a conservative in theology during the first half of his active editorial life. Later he became what he himself called a "liberal conservative." That is to say, his personal views were moderately conservative, but



he was boundlessly liberal in preserving the bonds both of personal friendship and of Christian fellowship with men whose views were either more conservative or more liberal than his own. In his early editorials (written while he was still a young man in his 30's) he was demanding of the churches rigid conformity to the apostolic pattern in all things, though he never went so far as to rule out organs or missionary societies. Thus he attempted to carry on the "restoration" emphasis which was indeed one element of the tradition derived from the founding fathers of Disciples of Christ. But gradually the unity element in that same tradition prevailed, and he came to see the incompatibility of the two, especially since the features of the primitive churches which were to be restored included a good many about which honest and intelligent differences of opinion were not only possible but actual. He became a spokesman for that more liberal strain in the Disciple tradition which sought unity among all Christians on such terms that matters of human opinion and debatable interpretations would no longer serve as barriers to keep them apart. In his last phase he came to regard the different views and practices of baptism as within the class of permissible differences by which Christians ought not to allow themselves to be divided.

The temptation is to extend and expand this list of those who are entitled to be enrolled in our Hall of Fame. These are only some, and by no means all, of those who may well be called the "fathers" of our movement. Our heritage is not alone from those who sounded the first note, took the first step, or laid the first stone, but also from those whose work, a little later, determined the direction, or even the diversity of directions, of the movement's development and guided it through some of its critical days. But the list must end somewhere. There must be some interval of time between our fathers and ourselves. Therefore, I have arbitrarily limited my enumeration to those who were born within the first half-century of our movement's history, and whose major work was done before its latest half-century. These then, together with many others who are left unnamed only because of the necessity of brevity, are the people whom we think of as our fathers when we speak of our fathers' heritage, and of our heritage from them.



Having said something in regard to the nature of heritages, and especially heritages of culture and ideas, and having identified the class of persons who are to be regarded as our fathers for the purposes of this discussion, let us now consider what it was that our fathers inherited from their fathers, and then what they did with it. Their heritage was a many-colored fabric with strands and bands of every shade and quality. In a sense, all history was their heritage, as it is ours. It included the whole stream of human culture through the ages, in so far as it had left a deposit of accessible and decipherable records or established patterns of thought and action. Within this stream were the inherited social and political traditions and institutions of Western man, including the then lately acquired boon of civil and religious liberty.

While all this is indispensable as basis and background, more to the point for our purposes is their religious heritage. Our fathers inherited Christianity. Shailer Mathews used to define Christianity as "the sum total of all that Christians have thought and done"—a definition open to obvious criticism but helpful as a warning against premature or partisan judgments as to what thoughts and actions of Christians in times past and present represent "true Christianity" and what do not. They also had a heritage from religions other than Christianity. In any case, the summary of the religious heritage must be made more explicit. For the sake of clarity, certain items may be enumerated, beginning with the most general:

1. A religious view of the world. This loose phrase is used to denote the realization that the whole pageant of nature and human life is more than meets the eye; that it contains elements, forces and values not to be apprehended by the physical senses; that it has mysterious meanings as well as obvious form and substance. This is, of course, not a specifically Christian idea. It is fundamental to all religions. Primitive peoples recognize it when they speak of "manu" and "taboo." Rudolf Otto calls it the "sense of the holy." Sophisticated peoples in a scientific age are in danger of losing it. Our fathers received it, as we do, directly through Christianity and in its Christian form, but indirectly from the ancient past and as an all-but-universal element in the stream of human culture.

2. The idea of God. This also has a long and intricate history. It came to our fathers in the form in which it had developed in the Hebrew-Christian tradition, and as further refined in the centuries of Christian thought.

3. The Christian gospel. This is preserved in the New Testament, but they received it, as we all do, by personal transmission through family and church. God and Christ—these are the basis and the crown of the whole heritage. These terms, however, sound more simple than they are. Definitions of God and of Christ were long ago put into standard forms that were acceptable to all the orthodox, but the actual concepts represented by these hallowed words ran through a considerable range of variation, even in the minds of those who would reject with horror the definitions of the nature of God by some of the philosophers or of the nature of Christ by Arius or Socinus. Similarly the nature and content of what all Christians called “the gospel” were matters of varied interpretation by the different groups of Christians. God, Christ and the gospel and all the various meanings that had been put into these terms—all were included within the heritage.

4. The Bible. Most important was the Bible itself, the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. One very large body of Christians, the Roman Catholics, included within their Old Testament the thirteen additional books which Protestants call “Apocrypha” and place on a lower level of sanctity, if any. One view of the nature of the Bible and of its plenary inspiration and absolute authority had been so universally held by all Christians for so many centuries that it may almost be said that the Christian heritage presented no other option. In the religious tradition that was transmitted to all Christians at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Bible was regarded as the infallible word of God. Its inspiration was held to be so complete that every single sentence of the Bible, whether it dealt with religious truth or with historical or scientific data, must be taken as divinely guaranteed to be the absolute truth.

5. The church. Here we must think of the church in two ways: the church as a concept and as an ideal institution inseparable from the concept of the gospel itself; and the church as a con-

crete reality, a social structure (or complex of structures) existing within the fabric of the social order. The church was "the body of Christ," a mystical entity existing in the mind of God and in the intention of Christ; and it was an institution on earth, having officers and members, owning property, entering into relations with governments, passing through all the vicissitudes of fortune that any other earthly institution or association of men might encounter. Both the concept of the church and the actuality of the church in history must be taken into account. The church was a very complicated item in their Christian heritage. Nearly everybody admitted, if the point were urged, that the church was, in some sense, a unity. Actually, of course, it was divided into many parts. In the time of our founding fathers most American Christians had come to believe that this divided condition was a very good arrangement. The denominational system was, in fact, much more decent and humane than the programs of persecution for the enforcement of a unity of uniformity which had preceded it. Our fathers inherited not only the church, thought of as the body of Christ and the continuing company of believers through the centuries and throughout the world, but also the denominational system as, in the common view, the most satisfactory form—or even as the only form—under which the church could exist under American conditions. We know, of course, what they thought about that.

6. The Protestant Reformation. The plane of cleavage between Roman and Greek Christianity had split the church so long ago, and the Eastern segment had so far passed out of the picture as Western eyes viewed it, that this great schism could go almost unnoticed in America. The Protestant Reformation, however, had produced a rupture which had been the most conspicuous fact of the Christian world since the sixteenth century. Our fathers had the precious heritage of the whole Protestant movement, which had in it a liberating principle and the seeds of spiritual freedom. The development of those seeds had been choked for a time by the carry-over of some traditions and practices alien to the spirit of Protestantism, but they had made a sturdy growth during the three centuries between Luther and the Campbells.

7. Christian doctrine, or theology. An impressive body of the-



ology had been accumulating since the days of the apostles. Paul has often been called the first Christian theologian, though many would say that Paul wrote only the truth that had been divinely revealed to him and should therefore not be classed among the theologians. However that may be, the theologizing process certainly began early. It was stimulated by the rise of heresies, under the influence of Greek and Oriental thought, which seemed to demand rebuttal by the orthodox. The process continued at an accelerating pace. The great landmark in the theology of the ancient church was the definition of the Trinity by the Council of Nicaea, which became the core of all later orthodox theology, the common property of Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Protestants. The subsequent ecumenical councils added specifications about the nature of Christ. Augustine's voluminous theological writing covered every aspect of Christian doctrine that he could think of and influenced all Christian thinkers after his time. The most important and generally accepted results of all this theological thinking were formulated in the great creeds, including the massive confessions in which the faith of the various segments of Protestantism were embodied.

Though much of this material seems speculative to modern observers, and though the whole course of its development was marked by controversy that often rose to the pitch of mutual acrimony among equally devout Christians, it was all believed by its authors and partisans to rest firmly on the authority of the Bible. This mass of theology was the product of centuries of biblical interpretation and of thinking about God and Christ and the ways of God to man. The theologians had sought to find a view of the cosmos which would be rational as well as religious, to define Christ in a way consistent with the religious values they had found in him and the scriptural texts concerning him, and to systematize what they believed to be the truth about the way of salvation and the destiny of man. The results were various and sometimes conflicting, but all of them and the process of attaining them were a large element in the Christian heritage.

While the so-called Athanasian Creed was never adopted by any major council, its opening declaration, "Whosoever wishes to be saved, it is above all things necessary that he believe . . .," expressed the almost universal attitude of Christian leaders toward the theologies of their respective groups as expressed in



their creeds and toward other Christians who did not accept them.

8. Philosophy. If every generation inherits, as it does, the products of the whole course of man's cultural history up to its own time, then philosophy would certainly fall within this broad field. However, its relation to theology is so close that, for our present purpose, it may well be singled out from other aspects of the history of civilization and accorded special mention. Christian theology has, in general, based its affirmations upon what has been believed to be revealed truth. Philosophy, on the other hand, is man's own effort to discover the truth about the cosmos by his own intellectual efforts. Dealing to a great extent with the same subject matter, the two have powerfully influenced each other. The theologian's interpretation of Scripture has inevitably borne the impress of his philosophical views. For example, Dean Inge wrote a book under the title, *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought*.

While our fathers were the heirs to all past philosophies, in that they could take and use them if they would, in so far as they knew them, there was one particular strain of philosophy which they knew best and which had most influenced them. This was the critical, common-sense attitude of the best minds of the Renaissance and of the 17th and 18th centuries which made possible the development of scientific method and its application in the critical examination of all sorts of traditions, including religious traditions. This could be dangerous to religion, and some of its results had been deplorable, but the absence of it had been even more dangerous. With all its possibilities for good and evil, this spirit of free investigation, with its elements of both empiricism and rationalism, was a feature of our fathers' heritage for them to take and use as they would.

9. Civil and religious liberty. In America our fathers could be free men in a free church existing side by side with, but separated from, a free government in a free nation. This heritage of liberty had long been building up, chiefly in Great Britain, through many turbulent years and against many obstacles. It came to its fullest, though never perfect, expression in the then new American nation. Thomas Campbell spoke in glowing terms of the uniquely favorable conditions which the new land of liberty afforded for the successful prosecution of the enterprise

he proposed to initiate, which, God willing, would be nothing less than restoring, reforming, revitalizing and uniting the church. Here was a nation of free men who cherished both liberty and union in their civic and political life. Might they not as Christians enjoy both liberty and union in the church? This nation had a Constitution which at once established the framework of an orderly and effective structure of government and guaranteed the liberties of its citizens. It seemed reasonable to believe that the church also had a constitution, the New Testament, which could perform similar functions and under which Christians could be free in mind and conscience while the church could become united in accordance with the will of Christ and efficient in the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. The heritage of freedom—the newest item in the inventory of their inherited resources—was cherished by our fathers as one that made possible the full utilization of all the rest, and which also guaranteed to them the freedom to choose from all the varied materials of their heritage what they would adopt as their own and to reject what their judgments and their consciences found unacceptable.

These things that I have enumerated constituted a vast heritage of ideas, ideals, mores, and intellectual and spiritual resources which were available to our fathers because they lived when and where they did. They were all carried in a stream of concrete history made up of events and personalities. All this, too, was a part of their heritage, and they themselves were within that stream.

Even with this addition my list is not complete. There were, for example, great traditions in language and symbolism, in all the products of man's creative imagination in the arts of poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, music. These are not unrelated to religion, for they are integral with human life on its highest levels. But however far we go in making inventory of the inherited resources, there would still be categories which we would later remember or discover.

Our question now is, How much of all this did our fathers accept, and how much did they either explicitly reject or fail to appropriate? This we must consider before we note what they added out of their own thinking and experience.

### *III*

## *What They Accepted*

THE FUND OF SPIRITUAL resources and religious ideas with which our fathers launched their movement consisted of what they accepted out of the heritage that had come down to them from earlier centuries and what they added by their own initiative out of their insights into the nature of Christianity and the needs of their own time and place. Since we have indicated in bare outline the scope and content of the heritage that was available to them, it may be conducive to clarity if we follow the same outline in considering what parts of this heritage they accepted and appropriated for their own use and what parts they rejected as either false or irrelevant to their purposes.

1. A religious view of the world. Of course they accepted that, and no more need be said about it.

2. God. Certainly they accepted the age-old concept of a personal and purposeful God of righteousness and love. So far as their own faith was concerned, they felt no more need of arguments to prove the existence of God than did the ancient Hebrews, whose literature is noticeably lacking in proofs of God's existence. The presupposition underlying all their thinking was that there is a God. In so far as early Disciples did enter into any argument on this point, as Alexander Campbell did in his debate with Robert Owen, it was not to resolve any doubt in their own minds or to fortify their convictions, but to discomfit the infidels, of whom there were a good many in the early nine-

teenth century, and to win the wavering, of whom there were still more. Their own minds were already made up.

Their concept of God was not fundamentally different from what had been the standard orthodox Christian concept for centuries, except that they had some reservations about the Nicene trinitarian formulation. This, it was held, used nonbiblical terminology and included a speculative element not supported by revelation. Barton W. Stone, especially in the early years of his connection with the "Christians," strongly opposed the trinitarian doctrine, not, he said, because it was unreasonable, though it did present a paradox to reason, but "because it was not revealed." He denied the Son's equality with the Father, and based his denial on scriptural texts. The Father "sends" and the Son is "sent." Surely, he said, a sender has superior authority over the one whom he sends. The Son does the Father's will: "Not my will but thine be done"; "I am come to do the will of him that sent me." Surely, said Stone, one who does another's will is subordinate to the one whose will he does. Moreover, he did not see how the Holy Spirit could be called a "person" in any intelligible sense of that term, and here again he cited texts which he regarded as supporting his view. For a few years Stone carried on a war of pamphlets on these and other points with leaders of Presbyterian orthodoxy in Kentucky. In this way the "Christians" brought upon themselves the charge of espousing "crypto-Arianism" or "crypto-Socinianism." Actually it is highly improbable that Stone derived anything from either Arius or Socinus, or that he had anything more than the most casual acquaintance with the writings or doctrines of either of them. Any resemblance between his views and theirs was purely coincidental, and the coincidence did not extend very far. Certainly there was never anything "crypto" about Stone's teachings on any subject. But "Arian" and "Socinian" were the standard terms of opprobrium by which to describe any deviation from the lines of historic trinitarian orthodoxy, and to call it "crypto" added a suggestion of subtle secrecy and so of moral turpitude to the charge of theological error.

I cannot find that Stone's left-wing theology made much impact upon the members of the movement with which he was associated; and he himself, though he did not recant, lost interest



in it. However, enough of it lingered in his mind and in the thinking of the Campbell stream to form a basis for the oft-repeated slogan, "We are neither Trinitarian nor Unitarian." In the Disciple version of the familiar hymn, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," the line, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity," was altered to read, "God over all, and blest eternally." Though they were allergic to the word, the fathers and Disciples generally remained essentially trinitarian in their equal reverence for Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. The Christian gospel. Certainly this was accepted as the central reality of Christian thought and action, and with a strong emphasis upon the need of it for the salvation of men. There was, however, a significant change in the manner of its presentation, and the new manner of presentation implied some change in the nature of what was being presented. It was the ancient gospel as distinguished from the current version. Walter Scott said that he had sought and found "a divinely authorized plan of preaching the Christian religion." This found expression in his famous "five-finger exercise." The change which this involved, as compared with the gospel of common Christian tradition, was that it made baptism (immersion) the third of three human acts (faith, repentance, and baptism) which were prerequisite to the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life (*i.e.*, salvation), and so, by inference, prerequisite to membership in the church. Neither Scott nor any of the other Disciples of his time quite knew what to do about the Holy Spirit. They could speak about the Holy Spirit in biblical terms, but were vague in the exposition of the meaning of these terms. They were in reaction against the current type of revivalism (especially Methodist and Baptist) which seemed to involve a superstitious reliance upon the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit to do for man what they thought man could very well do for himself.

Rigorous application of the negative implication of their formula of conversion was never possible. The fathers never had the heart to "damn the unimmersed," however definitely their systematization of the gospel might require it. They could, however, keep them out of the church. Stone never believed that immersion was essential to the status of a Christian. Alexander

Campbell explicitly denied it in his Lunenburg letter, as Thomas Campbell had done implicitly nearly thirty years earlier when he wrote that the denominations were divided by their differences about "things in which the kingdom of God does *not* consist." They were both evangelical and evangelistic. They gave to man a more active and responsible role in the determination of his destiny than Calvinism had allowed, but the gospel they preached was essentially the same gospel of salvation by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. They accepted without significant modification the common Protestant view of the nature of salvation. Though they tried to make the process of salvation perfectly clear (their critics thought they made it too clear) and the road to it open and accessible to all men, they did not generally describe the definiteness of the event as some of their contemporaries did so that a man could say, "I was saved at ten o'clock in the morning on the fifteenth day of last May." What men needed to be saved from, the fathers thought, was not a lost and sinful "state" imposed upon them by Adam's sin, but the evil and deadly consequences of their own personal sins. Without rejecting the doctrine of original sin, they paid slight attention to it in their thinking and preaching.

4. The Bible. The great reformers of the sixteenth century had repudiated the authority of ecclesiastical traditions and the decisions of the church as co-ordinate with that of the Bible and had rested their case on the Bible alone—an attitude later expressed in the slogan, "The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants." So the fathers of the nineteenth-century reformation repudiated the creeds in which Protestants had formulated what they believed to be the teaching of the Bible and insisted upon going back to the Bible itself. Taking their stand on the historic evangelical affirmation: "*Sola scriptura, sola fides, solus Christus*," they demanded and exercised a more thorough application of that "right of private judgment" in biblical interpretation which the earlier reformers had so stoutly affirmed and so soon abandoned. As the contrast in the sixteenth century had been between the Bible alone and the Bible amplified by the traditions and decrees of an infallible church, so in the early nineteenth century it was between the Bible alone and the Bible as interpreted in the authorized creeds of the various

Protestant groups. There is no doubt but that our fathers accepted this precious item in Christendom's heritage, the Bible. "The Bible itself," and not any "human interpretation" of it was to be the rock on which they built, but with each man free to make his own interpretations.

There were, however, two important reservations in the actual application of this slogan. One of these had to do with the nature of the Bible itself; the other grew out of the conviction that some parts of the Bible neither require nor admit of interpretation because their meaning is manifest to any honest reader. As to the nature of the Bible, our fathers (at least those of the first generation) did not admit that there was room for any difference of opinion as to the character or degree of its inspiration. It was not conceived to be within the scope of any man's private judgment to make his own decision as to the nature of the Bible after examining it to see what kind of book it actually is. Just as Luther and the other Reformers, while repudiating Catholic tradition as a whole, had retained one item in that tradition, namely, the dogma of the infallibility of the Bible as wholly and perfectly the Word of God, so our fathers, while repudiating both Catholic tradition and the creeds of the Protestant bodies, retained without inquiry or investigation that same concept of a perfect and infallible Bible which actually rested upon no other sanction than that of the Catholic tradition and the Protestant creeds. It was perfectly natural that they should do this. The critical questions about the Bible had not yet been raised. So far as they knew, there were only two possible opinions about the Bible. Infidels rejected it altogether; all Christians held it to be the Word of God in all its parts. Of course they chose to stand with the Christians. Since they built so confidently upon an unexamined presupposition about the nature of the Bible, they left to their successors some unsolved problems and some possibilities of conflict when the questions they did not face were raised a generation or two later.

As to interpretation, Thomas Campbell, in his *Declaration*, said that "no man has a right to judge his brother, except in so far as he manifestly violates the express letter of the law." He was of the opinion that there could be extracted from the New Testament a body of instructions concerning the organization,



doctrines, and practice of the church which would have no dependence upon "human opinion" or upon any process of interpretation but which would be the obvious and indisputable "exact letter of the law." While a broad platform upon which Christians might stand united could be built by excluding every "admixture of human opinion" from the basis of unity, the positive requirements of a united church would include a quite considerable amount of material taken directly from the Bible, in which they thought interpretation and human opinion played no part. These things came to include both the structure and worship of the church and the conditions of admission to it. It was agreed that most of the theological dogmas which furnished the content of the creeds and the differentia between sects were the result of varying interpretations. There was great gain in declaring that differences about these should not be grounds for separation among Christians. In reserving other items as belonging to "the express letter of the law" and as not requiring or admitting of "interpretation" (though Christians do, in fact, interpret them differently), new walls were erected and fortified by direct divine sanction. Some thirty years ago the author heard an eminently conservative and eminently successful pastor, speaking of the requirement of immersion as a condition of church membership, say, "This, being a revelation, does not require to be interpreted." He was going even beyond Thomas Campbell's view that the parts of revelation dealing with theology may be interpreted variously, but the parts relating to the church do not need interpretation at all. Both of these positions rest upon the proposition that the whole Bible is infallible truth.

5. The church. According to the whole Christian tradition, the church is the fellowship of believers, the "household of faith," the "body of Christ," the continuing agency for the preservation, propagation, and application of the gospel. Our fathers accepted as part of their heritage not merely the idea or concept of the church, but the church itself as a concrete reality both in history and in the life of their time—the church with all its faults (and they found many in it), but also with its prestige, its potentialities, its personnel, and the momentum of its onward march through the centuries. Their position would have been meaningless, indeed impossible, without a strong convic-



tion of the importance of the church. Their main purposes were to unify and purify the church. If the church were not important, why take such pains to purify and unify it? Of the two constantly affirmed objectives, "restoration" and "unity," the first had to do largely, the second wholly, with the rectification of the church. Such slight emphasis as they occasionally gave to the continuity of the church related rather to the continuity of the Christian community than to the continuity of any institutional or organizational form. The fact that there had always been groups of Christians who could collectively be called the church was affirmed chiefly to verify the fulfillment of Christ's promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Alexander Campbell used this text to prove that the medieval Catholic Church was truly church, though, in his judgment, a church badly distorted and corrupted. No importance was attached to that continuity of structure and unbroken succession of bishops from the days of the apostles which Roman Catholics and Anglicans regarded as essential to the authentic churchliness of the modern church, and no ecclesiastical sanction was considered necessary for the formation of a new local church. Their thought was directed toward restoring the *purity* of the church by sweeping away the distortions and accretions which had accumulated through the centuries, and its *unity* in conformity with the mind of Christ. Prominent among the accretions and corruptions they proposed to sweep away was the whole apparatus of bishops and prelates, all the machinery of ecclesiastical control over local congregations, and the entire concept of orders (or even one order) of "clergy" exercising authority in or over the churches. Theirs was a radical congregationalism and laicism.

There was nothing essentially new in the idea of a united church. On the contrary, complacent sectarianism was a relatively new phenomenon in the Christian world and was limited largely to the American scene. The idea of purifying the church by restoring features of original Christianity that had been lost and eliminating features that had been added had been, subject to certain variations in procedure, the standard practice of all the reformers and most of the heretics since the earliest days. Yet our fathers did add something new and significant to their heritage. Of this we shall speak later.

One characteristic of the church which the great reformers of the sixteenth century received from the medieval Roman Catholic Church and perpetuated in the churches to which their work gave rise was the concept that the membership of the church should include all the people in the governmental unit in which the church existed, and that the police power of the state should reinforce the disciplinary power of the church in the suppression of dissent or defection. Thus arose the great Protestant "state churches" which shamefully continued the practice of religious persecution until they learned, chiefly from secular sources, the lesson of civil and religious liberty. A marginal minority of left-wing Protestants learned that lesson early, so that before the American revolution there had come to be a free-church tradition as well as a state-church tradition. The church which our fathers, like all other American Protestants, accepted as part of their heritage was a church completely free from the state. Like the Baptists, but unlike some of the others, they accepted it as a matter of principle, not merely as an accommodation to conditions peculiarly American.

6. The Protestant Reformation. The indebtedness of all evangelical Christians to the liberating work of the great reformers and to the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century was gratefully acknowledged, with regret only that the Reformation had so soon permitted itself to freeze into fixed forms of ecclesiastical authority and creedal norms which became barriers against fellowship among Christians. Even so, our fathers counted themselves as Protestants—more Protestant, they thought, than any other Protestants. It is well known that many Baptists refuse to permit themselves to be classed as Protestants, on the ground that they have a lineage from the first century independent of that which runs through medieval Catholicism and the reforms led by Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the English reformers of the time of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Elizabeth. The Anabaptist movement was indeed quite independent of these, and was persecuted by most of them. Disciples might have made a similar claim to being the heirs of an evangelical underground through all the dark ages if they had been willing, as some Baptists are, to adopt as their ecclesiastical ancestors the whole catalogue of dissenters from orthodoxy and rebels against

monolithic Catholicism, beginning with the Montanists and Novatians and continuing through Donatists, Paulicians, Cathari, Burgomiles, Henricians, Arnoldists, Petrobrusians, Albigensians, and Waldensians. In this connection it is not necessary for the author to express his judgment as a historian as to whether or not these resisters of Roman authority had any continuity among themselves or furnish an unbroken genealogy for any modern group, but it can be safely said that they have no place on the family tree of Disciples of Christ to the exclusion of Luther and Calvin. Our fathers were proud to consider themselves Protestants in the normal and accepted sense of that word, and so are we.

It was inevitable that the Disciple pioneers should wholeheartedly accept the two great Protestant principles: justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers. The first of these was proclaimed by Luther as the alternative to the Catholic doctrine that the favor of God and the forgiveness of sins could be obtained by such ceremonial works as penances, pilgrimages, and the purchase of indulgences and by the *ex opere operato* efficacy of sacraments. The exigencies of controversy about the "faith alone" doctrine sometimes led Luther into extreme expressions which could be interpreted to imply the utter repudiation of reason and the irrelevance of morality to religion. This was far from his intent. The rejection of reason was his recognition of the mysteries which lie beyond its reach, but he used it also as an escape from some inconsistencies in his own position. For example, after declaring in the most absolute terms that no sacrament can have the slightest effect without the conscious and active consent of the recipient, he nevertheless retained the baptism of infants because that appeared essential to the total-population type of church that seemed to him necessary. In adopting the principle of justification by faith, our fathers were more rigorous and also more cautious than those from whom they had received it. Their view was more rigorous in that they followed Luther's early teaching rather than his compromise in practice by insisting that candidates for baptism must be capable of having a faith of their own. An "imputed faith" (Luther's phrase to justify the baptism of infants), or the faith of their parents, was not enough. The individual's personal freedom and his personal



responsibility in the making of all decisions affecting his salvation were inescapable corollaries to the proposition that justification is by a faith which is not real unless it is personal. Their application of the principle was more cautious in that, while recognizing faith as both the initial and the pivotal factor in man's part of the process of salvation, they explicitly insisted that faith must bear its fruit in repentance and turning toward a new way of life. Both faith and repentance, they held, must be symbolized and certified by obedience in baptism.

The other Reformation principle, the priesthood of all believers, was not only accepted but for a time was carried to an impractical and untenable extreme. Primarily this Protestant principle was invoked to open the way for man's unmediated access to God with no priestly intervention, and for God's forgiveness and grace to have equally unmediated and unimpeded access to men, with no priest to say—or refuse to say until his requirements had been met—“*Absolvo te.*” The common Christian was his own priest; and not only priest for himself but empowered and required, by virtue of his status as a Christian, to aid his fellow Christians in their spiritual warfare and in exercising their own equally valid priesthood. The Reformation leaders declared that the church did not consist of two kinds of people: a priestly class to control the channels of divine grace and to rule and discipline the people, and a class of commoners (the laity) to be so disciplined and ruled. On the contrary, it consisted of one class only: the Christian people. These people would certainly be on many levels of intelligence, education, capacity for leadership, and worldly fortune, but there was no difference among them in their status before God. It was for this reason that Luther, in the first of his three great reformation tracts or treatises written in 1520, could appeal to the laity to reform the church; and he appealed specifically to “the Christian nobles of the German nation” because the nobles were the laymen who were in the best position to take effective action.

However, a kind of quasi priesthood developed in Protestantism in the persons of ecclesiastical dictators, clerical assemblies writing creeds and canons, and clergy who sometimes assumed airs of superiority as though they were lords over the flock instead of ministers to it. The priesthood of all believers



was never intended to imply that the church did not need competent leaders, properly educated interpreters and expounders of Christian truth, and pastors qualified to shepherd the flock. The distinction between clergy and laity, however, in many areas did become a distinction not only of function but of status.

The fathers of our movement had had unhappy experiences with what seemed to them the arrogance of the clergy. They thought the clergy were chiefly to blame for the theological subtleties and ecclesiastical politics which formed barriers between Christians and divided the one church into embattled sectarian camps. In consequence they became far more equalitarian than Luther had ever been. The very word "clergy" became taboo among them; and so, naturally, the word "laity" fell into disuse for a long time, for the concept of laity can have its distinctive meaning only when it stands in contrast with clergy. It was an obvious, practical necessity that there should be preachers, or ministers, but there was nothing these could do that any Christian might not do if he *could*. The line between ministers and laymen was not sharply drawn. Many ministers had a secular occupation on the side, and many laymen preached as opportunity offered. Ordination was not always practiced, and in any case it conferred no powers or prerogatives. My father, who attained rather exceptional eminence as a minister, was never ordained; and I was not until middle life, after my name had been in the list of ministers in the Disciples' Yearbook for more than twenty years.

This low-church view of the ministry had both good and bad effects. It restored to the laity their rightful status and responsibilities. It threw upon each minister the responsibility for winning influence and prestige, if he was ever to have any, by his own ability, personality, and character. It kept open the possibility of the utmost in confidence, loyalty, and respectful affection for ministers of such stature that they could win such response from their people, and it left (and still leaves) a great many ministers in the precarious position of being their congregations' hired men. It is not easy to accept the heritage of this great principle, the priesthood of all believers, and to apply it to the development of the church as a spiritual democracy rather than an ecclesiastical feudalism, and at the same time to have a free

pulpit and the leadership of a competent, courageous, and properly respected ministry; but it can be done, and it is worth the effort and the risk.

7. Theology and doctrine. Our fathers had open to them a tremendous heritage in this area, but it was one that they would accept only on their own terms and with cautious selectivity. The process of formulating the Christian faith into definite doctrinal propositions began very early, perhaps with the Apostle Paul. The defense of the faith against the pagans and against those erratic Christians whom the main body regarded as heretics called for further theological elaboration. The great church fathers of the second and third centuries—men like Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Cyprian—exercised their piety, their zeal, and their high intelligence in this continuing effort to state the Christian faith and the concepts underlying it or implicit in it in terms that would be intelligible and, if possible, convincing to those on the outside and would also prevent those within the fold from wandering into devious paths of speculative error. It must be remembered that the New Testament as we have it did not exist in the second and third centuries. The writings existed, along with many other Christian writings. Before the end of the second century it was generally agreed that some of these writings had a sacred and authoritative quality that set them apart from the others, but even at the end of the third century it was not quite certain just which writings these were, though by that time the margin of uncertainty was relatively small. Complete agreement did not come until the latter half of the fourth century, but already long before that there was a sufficient body of writings believed to be by apostles or their contemporaries, and therefore authoritative, to furnish a solid basis upon which doctrinal formulations could rest.

Christianity had received from Judaism its doctrine of One God, but Christianity was having its growth in a society whose religious tradition was entirely polytheistic. The very core of the Christian faith was a religious evaluation of Jesus Christ which placed him high above the human level and could be expressed only by saying that he was the "Son of God." This phrase, which has seemed to most Christians in later centuries so clearly definitive, was by no means unambiguous in the period of which we

are speaking. Those who were familiar with the Hebrew idiom knew the figurative or rhetorical use of the phrase, "son of. . . ." There were "sons of wrath," "sons of consolation," "sons of thunder," "sons of the Devil." There were "sons of God" in the sixth chapter of Genesis and in the first chapter of Job, and the Christian Scriptures called Adam a "son of God" and declared that Christians could "become sons of God." To the Graeco-Roman pagans to whom Christianity was being preached, the phrase "son of God" had a clear enough meaning, but it was the wrong meaning. Their gods, especially Zeus, had plenty of sons, some by divine and some by human mothers. This parallel, as an explanation of the nature of Christ, was completely repulsive to Christians, and the concept of the miraculous birth of Jesus did not make it any less so.

Here then were two urgent needs: first, to make a statement about the nature of Christ which would be an adequate justification for the religious evaluation that was given to him; and second, to make a statement affirming his Sonship and Godhood while excluding the grossness of the pagan concept and not surrendering or compromising the doctrine of One God. This was the problem faced by the bishops—three hundred more or less, all but a handful from east of the Adriatic—whom Constantine summoned to meet at Nicaea in the first great council of the church. The problem was acute because the church was already on the point of being seriously divided by differences of opinion as to its solution. The outcome of this turbulent conference, as everyone knows, was the Nicene Creed, which defined the doctrine of the Trinity. Further councils during the next two or three centuries slightly modified the Nicene formulation and produced majority decisions concerning the exact relations between the human element and the divine element in the person of Jesus. By these decisions, which became the standard of theological orthodoxy, the church flung off "heresies"—Arian, Nestorian, Monophysite, Monothelite—whose partisans had to be fought by every resource that church and state could command. Luther declared his willingness to accept the canons of the first seven Ecumenical Councils, from the first Nicene in 325 to and including the second Nicene in 787.

This, then, became the basic theological heritage of Protes-



tantism; and this, plus the confessions which the great Protestant churches produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to combat "Roman errors" and to cover points not raised in the early councils, became the theological heritage of our fathers. What did they do with it?

For the most part, they did nothing at all with it. Not many of them knew much about it. The central core of Nicene orthodoxy coincided with their basic belief in God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. This belief had come to them in the main current of Christian faith through all the centuries. They held it (in so far as they did hold it) not because it had come to them in that way, or because it was in all the creeds and confessions, but because they found it in the New Testament, and they let all the speculative subtleties go by unnoticed because they did not find them in the New Testament. The particular problems which had troubled and divided the Nicene fathers were not problems for them. There were no pagans to interpret sonship in the pagan fashion, and for them the divine Sonship did not threaten to compromise the unity of God. They were satisfied to return to the simple statement that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," and leave it at that. On most of the questions which the modern creeds raised, and to which they gave conflicting answers, they did not take sides. This was not primarily the result of intellectual indolence or theological ignorance (though there was doubtless plenty of the latter) but was the result of an insight in which they were ahead of their time and, for a great part of the Christian world, still ahead of our time.

This insight was that seeking answers to all these questions might be an edifying occupation for individuals who were interested in them, but that, since there was sure to be disagreement about the answers, it was a fatal error for the church to put the stamp of its approval on any one set of answers and brand as heretics and aliens all who did not accept them. Since this was exactly what the church did every time it adopted a creed, and since this procedure had been splitting the church ever since it had begun to follow this practice, the only sensible procedure was to abandon the creeds and set Christians free to do such thinking as they could on these subtle themes without erecting their opinions into criteria of orthodoxy which would be di-



visive. It was not that they denied the content of the creeds. To do that would simply be to make new ones which would be the reverse of the old. It was to say that extensive bodies of doctrine, however true, ought not to be codified and canonized as authoritative standards upon conformity to which Christian fellowship is to be conditioned. The theologizing process and all its results, whether embodied in creeds and confessions or not, are still parts of the common Christian heritage which any individual can accept or reject at his own discretion—and at his own risk.

8. Philosophy. The critical, common-sense, exploratory temper of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Renaissance and the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy of the Enlightenment constituted an important element in the intellectual climate in which our founding fathers lived, and furnished in part the method which they applied to the problems which confronted them. It has been suggested that Alexander Campbell was a child of the Renaissance more than of the Reformation. The proposition would be debatable, and I am not affirming it. However, it cannot be doubted that the spirit of these stimulating and liberating movements affected the thinking of our founding fathers, and, in my judgment, affected it for good. The questioning mood, the refusal to be bound by ancient traditions and self-constituted authorities, the demand for intelligible evidence as a condition precedent to belief—these characteristics of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment were as essential to freeing religion from the dead hand as they were to putting modern science on the road to discovery. The skeptical attitude was of the essence of this whole trend in thought, if “skeptical” is taken in its primary sense as describing a critical method of free investigation and not as denoting the negative conclusions in regard to religion which sometimes result from the application of that method. It is true that both of these movements, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, produced negative attitudes toward religion in some of their leaders and in many more who followed these leaders imitatively and without doing much thinking of their own. The eighteenth century was marked by a great increase of unbelief in revealed religion. The Romantic movement and its religious counterpart in Methodism and the Evangelical Revival

in England furnished a way of escape for many from the rather bleak conclusions of the unbelieving philosophers of the Enlightenment, but they afforded little comfort to those more rugged Christian thinkers who were convinced that the demands of reason and evidence, in religion as in other things, could not be brushed off by a retreat to incommunicable "feeling" and mystical experience. It is significant that Alexander Campbell had been early schooled in the philosophy of John Locke, whom he later called "the Christian philosopher" and from whose fundamental principles he never departed; and that the first college founded by Disciples, with Walter Scott as its first president, was named in honor of Francis Bacon, the apostle of the empirical method and so, in a loose sense the founder of modern science.

Campbell's insistence upon the necessity of empirical evidence derived from observation, experience, and reliable testimony, and his rational method of drawing his conclusions from such evidence, were qualified by and conditioned upon his acceptance of the testimony of an infallible Bible to revealed truths. He had little confidence in "natural religion." For him, religion was either revealed or it was nothing. The more emphatic the rejection of "feeling" as a criterion of truth, and the more complete the reliance upon the rational use of empirical data as the basis of any sound faith, the more necessary it became to turn to the Bible with its wealth of religious truths and commands, and to do this with full conviction that this was solid ground, the veritable Word of God. Statements in the Bible were themselves data of observation. They were there for all to see or hear who would.

Though the perfect accuracy of the record was rather a pre-supposition than an empirically established fact, its interpretation required the use of a rational method based upon an examination of the book itself. It was by this method that Campbell arrived at his famous "rules of interpretation" which he set forth in his *Christian System*. This led to a more discriminating use of texts than had been common before his time. While both Testaments were presumed to be completely inspired and perfectly adapted to the purposes God intended them to serve, it was no longer possible to end an argument on any subject by quoting

a verse at random and shouting triumphantly, "The Bible says." One must ask, "Who said it? to whom? when? under what circumstances? and with what intent?" Campbell, unfortunately, did not press these inquiries far enough to become a higher critic; but he did press them far enough to declare that one could not go to the Old Testament—which, as Thomas Campbell said, contained the perfect constitution of the Jewish church—to get information about the constitution or ordinances of the Christian church or the specific duties of Christians under the new dispensation. Two examples of the results of this method were: that the old argument for infant baptism on the ground that it "came in place of circumcision" was completely exploded; and that Disciples never called the first day of the week the "Sabbath."

The formulation of the terms of the gospel and the whole evangelistic procedure of our early leaders reflect the influence of the nonmystical, empirical, common-sense philosophy which they inherited and which was, in effect, accepted even by those who knew nothing about it as a philosophy. It was not merely that they redefined faith in terms of the belief of objective evidence and discounted the evidential value of subjective "feeling," though these things they did. They could not gain the benefits of a philosophy which encouraged clear thinking and a rational approach to truth without being exposed to some correlative dangers. There was the tendency to cramp the truth to fit the logic of the system; to be argumentative and contentious; to make religion, as their critics said, more a matter of the head than of the heart. There were some in the second generation, not hostile critics but loyal advocates of the movement, who felt that what the first generation had conceived with intense conviction, worked out with scholarly skill, and uttered with a certain fine careless rapture that hinted at divine mysteries beyond man's power of rational analysis, had lost its passion and its power—that the music had gone out of it and the beauty departed, leaving only the dubious satisfaction of knowing that we were *right* and everyone else wrong where they differed from us. Note the titles of two widely read books by two widely (and justly) respected authors: *The Divine Demonstration* and *The Scheme of Redemption*. There is a degree of danger in too much



clarity in regard to the things of the spirit. The idolater shrinks his god to his own size when he makes an image of him so that he may have a clear and distinct representation of him. The same thing can be done with words by giving too precise definitions of the ineffable.

9 (and last in this catalogue of the inherited resources that were available to our fathers). Civil and religious liberty. One is tempted to dwell on this point with enthusiasm and with some elaboration, but that temptation must be resisted. It is not even necessary in his connection to expound at length the author's favorite thesis, that religious liberty is simply a special case under the more general category of civil liberty, and that anything that looks like religious liberty in a jurisdiction where civil liberty does not exist is merely a special privilege insecurely based and precariously held. That is an important truth that should be remembered when religious liberty is under discussion. In any case, liberty of either kind had been a plant of slow growth in the Western world and had never taken very firm root anywhere else. The rights and liberties of the individual, or the common man, had made more progress in England than elsewhere during the latter part of the Middle Ages. There was Parliament with at least nominal representation of the Commons. There was the growing English Common Law, with its trial by jury, its writ of habeas corpus, and its regularized judicial procedure. None of these at that time, or until much later, gave any protection to dissenters from the established church. The Protestant reformers assumed the right of private judgment but their churches quickly entrenched themselves behind the protection of their respective states and utilized the police power to guarantee their monopolies of their limited fields. A grant of religious liberty would have meant condoning treason and anarchy so long as the theory prevailed that homogeneity in religion was essential to the stability of the state and the cohesion of the social order. It was the application of that theory that drove the Puritans from England to America in the 1630's; and it was the somewhat modified application of that same theory for a time by the Puritans in New England that has given them their not fully deserved reputation for intolerance—as though they had invented it. The bitter truth is that, ever since the alliance of church and



state in the fourth century, religious intolerance had been the almost universal practice—nearly, if not quite, *semper, ubique et ab omnibus*—and a practice for which no one felt the slightest need of making any explanation or apology. The most significant breakthrough occurred in England with the bloodless revolution of 1689. This ended the persecution of Protestant dissenters and made all forms of Protestant Christianity (except Unitarianism) licit religions while the government still favored the Episcopal organization. Similarly Constantine, by his edict of toleration in 313, had ended the persecution of Christians and made all religious licit, while giving his personal and official favor to Christianity. The Roman era of toleration ended half a century after Constantine's death and Christianity became the persecuting religion. In England, on the contrary, the era of liberty that began in 1689 was no mere tolerant interlude while the sword of persecution was being shifted into the hands of the other party. It was a genuine, permanent, and increasing victory for civil and religious liberty. The events in England reinforced similar changes that were occurring in the British colonies in America. With the establishment of the Federal Union under the Constitution, America moved farther ahead on the path of religious liberty than England ever had, or has up to now.

Into this heritage of liberty the two Campbells and Walter Scott entered—by adoption so far as concerns the American aspect of it—when they migrated to these shores. Barton Stone had it all as his birthright, for his great-great-grandfather was the first Protestant governor of Maryland, under whose administration Maryland's first Act of Toleration was passed. Need it be said that our fathers embraced this element of their heritage with gratitude and enthusiasm? They rejoiced to find themselves in a land whose large liberty not only gave scope for the full and free development of human personality but afforded a uniquely favorable field for the religious work to which they were about to commit themselves.

So much our fathers accepted out of all that the stream of history brought down and placed within their reach. It was by no mere whim that they chose some things from this treasure to make their own, and rejected others. They exercised a critical selectivity in choosing the things that were consistent with their

principles and convictions and could, in their judgment, be building stones for the structure they proposed to erect. Further, they added some things of their own which enriched as well as diminished the heritage that became theirs to transmit to us, if we will take it.

Since Disciples of Christ are entitled to claim as their fathers not only the leaders of the first generation but also the men of the second and third, we must consider both what the first fathers added on their own initiative to that part of their heritage which they accepted, and how the later ones interpreted all this and what they did with it.

## IV

### *What They Rejected and Added*

IN SURVEYING, in the two preceding chapters, the common Christian and cultural tradition inherited by all American Protestants at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and in noting what parts of this heritage the founding fathers of Disciples of Christ accepted, it was inevitable that there should be some indications, explicit or implied, as to the features which they rejected and some hints concerning what they added to the common store for transmission as a heritage to the generations that were to come after them. Let us now note more specifically what they rejected and what they added, and then, in the following chapter, take a bird's-eye view of the consequences that flowed from attempting to put into practice the net product of this entire process of accepting, rejecting, and adding.

The fathers rejected the denominational system. This was the newest feature of their heritage. It might almost be called an American invention dating from the beginning of the federal government, though of course it was the result of processes that had long been developing in England and in the British colonies in America. It was almost universally popular among the people of the new republic, because it seemed to be the perfect goal of the long quest for religious liberty. It specifically marked the end of all attempts to enforce, by violence and persecution when necessary, the medieval theory that a state must have only one church the membership of which should include the total popu-

lation of the state. The Protestant states of Europe had so far modified their practice as to recognize the political necessity of abandoning all coercive measures and permitting "dissenting" organizations to exist, but with their members still subject to some civic and social disabilities. In these countries the established church still enjoyed the prestige, the official status and the property that had belonged to the one church that had been allowed to exist in the earlier times. In America the denominations were not only free but equal in the eyes of the law, and their ties with the state were completely severed. This was the denominational system. It seemed the embodiment of the American ideal of individual liberty, as indeed it was, and most Americans accordingly loved it. Our fathers were wholly in favor of the principle and practice of liberty which this system involved, and they had no desire to revive or restore the old system of compulsion and discrimination by the government or any other relationship between church and state; but they rejected the denominational system because it ratified, sanctioned, and even glorified the division of the church into a multiplicity of sects. They loved liberty, but they hated what Thomas Campbell called the "horrid evil" of division among Christians. Like most other Americans of their time, they rejected the total-population concept of the church, and insisted that membership should be voluntary, but they dared to imagine that Christians could be free and could yet be united. Whether or not the total population of a country would then be in the one church would depend entirely on whether or not they could all be brought to accept Christ voluntarily on the basis of their own personal faith.

They rejected creeds. They were very emphatic about this, and the more emphatic they were the more their contemporaries misunderstood the meaning of their rejection. They did not deny the truth of the doctrines contained in the creeds. In fact, they agreed substantially with the main points, and certainly with the general intent, of such historic ancient creeds as the Apostolic and the Nicene. What they rejected was the idea and the practice of giving a church's sanction to any extended series of doctrinal propositions and using the acceptance of these propositions as the test of a person's fitness for admission to the fellowship of that church or of his standing in the church when he has been



admitted. A creed has been defined as "an authoritative formula intended to define at certain points what is held by a congregation, a synod, or a church to be true and essential, and to exclude what is held to be false belief." Their objection was focused upon the notion that the beliefs so defined should be regarded as "essential." They held that the faith by which men are saved, and therefore the only faith that can be the criterion of Christian fellowship, is faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior. Every creed that goes beyond this is a potential cause of division among the followers of Christ because it demands of them as a condition of fellowship more than Christ and the apostles demanded as conditions of discipleship. However stoutly the synods and councils may declare that all the theological propositions which they include in their creeds are based upon the infallible truth as revealed in Holy Scripture, the fact is that these propositions are fallible deductions and inferences with which many equally devout and intelligent Christians can and do disagree. All this they put into the category of human opinion. Creeds are therefore, they said, essentially divisive in their intent and in their effects. They are meant to solidify parties within the church, not to unify the church. The only escape from this conclusion would be to say that those who do not accept some particular creed are not Christians at all and are therefore not in the church, so that the whole church consists of those who belong to the party that accepts this creed. But this is false. Therefore, since creeds inevitably produce division in the church which Christ wished to be united, creeds should be done away with.

As a further charge in the indictment, it could be said that the effect of creeds and officially adopted confessions of faith is to encroach upon the individual Christian's liberty of opinion in an area in which his thought should be free. Even if some denominations do not rigorously require that their lay members shall affirm their acceptance of the confessions of faith that have received official sanction, those laymen who do not accept them are reduced to the status of tolerated dissenters or second-class citizens in the church.

These were the basic rejections without which the movement initiated by the founding fathers could not have gone forward at all. Though the rejection of something is, on the face of it, a

negation, it will be observed that these two great rejections rested on affirmation of their opposites. To affirm the essential unity of the church and to launch a movement toward realizing that unity was to reject the denominational system. To affirm the sufficiency of a simple faith in Christ as Lord and Savior and the freedom of Christians to interpret Scripture and think for themselves was to reject creeds.

As the leaders pursued their inquiries into the nature, structure, and functions of the church, they arrived at several other conclusions which involved the rejection of various features of the churches around them. In doing this they established certain patterns of procedure which came to be regarded as virtually mandatory among their followers as the "movement" crystallized into a body of congregations bearing all the visible marks of a denomination. These modes of thought and action generally found their sanction in the fact that they were believed to be features of primitive Christianity. The "restoration of primitive Christianity" was a second general principle and motive, coordinate with that of seeking the way toward the unity of Christians and generally regarded as the means by which unity was to be achieved. The adoption of the ideas and practices which they believed to be those of the primitive church, as these were recorded in the New Testament, naturally led the fathers to reject some items which were deeply imbedded in the historic tradition of Christianity and so constituted parts of the heritage that had come down to them with the prestige of almost universal acceptance.

They rejected every kind of connexional church polity which would destroy or limit the autonomy of the local congregation. Of these polities, the episcopal system was the one having by far the longest unbroken history. At least from the second century there had been bishops who were the chief officers of city churches, each presiding over a group of presbyters and probably exercising some sort of jurisdiction over the churches in the surrounding villages. From this had grown the gigantic and comprehensive hierarchy which, for western Europe, centered at Rome. Eastern Christianity remained episcopal, in national units. When the Reformation drew off a large part of Christendom from the Roman allegiance, the episcopal line remained un-

broken in England and was later expanded through the British empire and to the American colonies which became the United States. The Anglican theory was that the administrative organization of the church naturally and properly exists in separate national units so that the Protestant Episcopal Church in each country is entirely autonomous, though related to all the others by consultation and intercommunion. To be within this family of churches, it is essential that each national church have its properly consecrated bishops whose episcopal lineage can be traced back to the one common source. Episcopacy continued also as the structure of the Lutheran churches in the Scandinavian countries, but without stress upon the necessity of a continuity of bishops. The Methodists, only gradually withdrawing from the Church of England, retained the term "bishop" but only as designating an administrative office, not an "order of the ministry" or as an element in the essential structure of the church. Calvinism and the Reformed churches eliminated the bishops and established a presbyterial system, held to be based on the New Testament pattern, which was no less strongly connexional than the episcopal. Lutheranism in Germany developed a synodical system strong enough to be an efficient guardian of orthodoxy.

The complete independence and autonomy of the local congregation had been a doctrine of certain minority movements such as the early Baptists and the Independents who were the English forebears of the American Congregationalists. While the defenders of episcopacy and the Presbyterian nonseparatist Puritans were struggling to retain or secure the nation-wide dominance of their respective systems by act of Parliament, the Independents declared that an individual congregation could proceed with "reformation without tarrying for any." The congregation at Scrooby did so, and ultimately became our Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth. Independency is a living part of the Congregational tradition, but the exigencies of history led to a degree of interdependence among congregations that appreciably modified the original assertion of absolute independence. American Congregationalism became less congregational than the Baptists, and Disciples were from the start more congregational than either. The Baptists emphasized the independence of the churches from



control by the state, but formed rather closely bound associations of their congregations. Disciples took for granted the separation of church from state, since it was already an accomplished fact, and made the independence of every congregation from every other congregation and from any overhead organization a cardinal point in their polity.

The men who were initiating the movement that became Disciples of Christ were radical congregationalists in their views of church polity. Local congregations, they held, could be formed without any sort of authorization from outside, and could conduct their own affairs without check or direction from outside or overhead; and when so formed and so conducted, they were authentic churches and were parts of the universal church. When Barton Stone and his four colleagues withdrew from the jurisdiction of the Synod of Kentucky, they formed what they called the Springfield Presbytery—though it apparently never was, in either structure or function, the sort of organization that could qualify as a presbytery under any form of Presbyterian law. Within less than a year they dissolved the “presbytery,” primarily, as they said, because they wished to “sink into unity with the Church of Christ at large” and the name they were abandoning suggested that they were still within a particular denomination. But in dissolving the “presbytery” and creating no form of connexional body to take its place, they were also giving evidence of their belief that such organizations were unnecessary if not illegitimate. The “Christian Churches” between 1804 and 1832 practiced a reasonable degree of fraternal co-operation among congregations but did not link them together in any formal structure. The Campbell side of the Disciple heritage was even more emphatic in affirming the autonomy of the local congregation and repudiating any more centralized control. After Walter Scott’s evangelistic campaigns in Ohio’s Western Reserve had molded the thinking of the Baptist churches of that region into the likeness of his own and the Campbells’ concepts, the first thing that happened was the dissolution of the Mahoning Association. This act was so decisive that the existence of Disciples of Christ as a separate and recognizable body has often been dated from this event.

The concept of faith as the result of a rational process of the



human mind acting upon evidence was not an absolute novelty. One of its ablest exponents had been Robert Sandeman, who set forth his view in a 600-page book which was popular enough to have a fourth edition in 1803, almost half a century after its original publication. But this view of faith was contrary to the main current of Christian thought, both historical and contemporary. Our fathers adopted it, perhaps because of their background of Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophy. The practical importance of this lies in the fact that this conception of faith was a foundation stone in the clear-cut "plan of salvation" which made their evangelism so spectacularly successful. This formulation of the process of conversion, of which Walter Scott was the principal architect, with the evangelistic technique based on it, was a genuine addition of their own to their heritage from the past. This was the thing, more than any other, that got their show on the road and put Disciples in the way of becoming "a great people."

Though the idea of a united church was old, there was an element of striking originality in the basic character of the appeal for unity as made by the founding fathers of Disciples of Christ. They were the first, so far as I can learn, to propose the reunification of the church by rediscovering the original terms upon which persons were admitted to the church and making these the terms of admission now. Much has already been said concerning this radical proposal, and more must still be said. It was, in the judgment of the present writer, the vital core of the movement initiated by our fathers.

Protestantism had discarded the Catholic idea of a Priesthood ordained and commissioned to serve as intermediaries between God and the lay members of the church and to control the flow of divine grace to sinful man, while it had retained the idea of a ministry trained and designated to teach and lead and to minister to the spiritual needs of the people—to "preach the gospel and administer the sacraments." In spite of Luther's early insistence that the church was really composed of its members, and that ministers were merely members to whom certain special duties had been assigned, the clergy continued to be regarded as a very special class within the church, so that there was a distinct cleavage between clergy and laity. In the great state

churches the gap between these two classes of Christians grew wider because of the graded scale of clerical dignitaries ranging from the simple parish minister to the bishops and archbishops. The House of Lords in the British Parliament contained (and still contains) a large section of bishops. "Lord Bishop" is a well-known phrase clearly expressing the elevated status of a member of one of the higher echelons of the clergy. In the English language of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the term "reverend" as applied to members of the clergy had no special religious significance. It was used as an acknowledgment that the person addressed belonged to a superior social class. It could be applied to the mayor of a town or any other local dignitary. Shakespéare makes Othello address the town council of Venice as "most potent, grave and reverend seignors." The dissenting churches in Great Britain and their counterparts in America continued, though in a diminished degree, to grant to their ministers not only the degree of respect to which their calling and their generally superior education justly entitled them, but also a kind of status and authority which might be questioned.

Alexander Campbell not only questioned but denounced and ridiculed what he considered the excessive respect for ministers. In his *Christian Baptist* days, his satire was expended upon the pretentiousness and pomposity of some of the frontier clergy. As this phase passed, he more tellingly and logically argued that the distinction between clergy and laity was wholly without scriptural warrant and was inconsistent with the nature of the church. There were many things to be done in churches, and everybody could not do everything, so there must be some specialization, some distribution of functions. This was foreseen and provided for in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 12. But, said Campbell, Paul was not dividing the church into clergymen and laymen; on the contrary he was sanctioning the assignment of particular kinds of duties to those members of the church who were best fitted to perform them, but was not setting up any gradations of status or dignity among them. Consequently, as we list the features of the total Christian heritage which Campbell and his associates rejected, we must include every form of "clericalism," from the hieratic and hierarchical system of Roman Catholicism to the assumed and unwarranted authority

and the airs of superiority put on by the more pretentious of American ministers. Yet, as will presently be emphasized, they did not discount the necessity of an educated and responsible ministry.

The status of the minister as being essentially that of one of the lay officers of the church was clearly indicated by giving him no other title than that of "elder." This practice prevailed for a long time. Elders and deacons were the two kinds of church officers who were found to be authorized by the New Testament. They were ordinary members of the congregation elected to these offices usually for a specific term. (The theory, "once an elder always an elder," never had general acceptance.) The minister was, strictly speaking, only an elder to whom certain special functions were assigned, the chief of which was preaching. Until well toward the end of the nineteenth century, and perhaps later in some places, it was customary for a minister who was entering upon a new pastorate to respond to the "invitation" at the end of his first sermon, take his place on the front pew, and be received into the membership of the church by one of the elders, after which a meeting of the congregation was called and the new pastor was elected as an elder. Evidently it was felt that Ephesians 4:11, which mentions pastors along with apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers, did not furnish solid ground for recognizing that the pastor as such had a distinct place in the structure of the local church. Long before the first generation of our fathers had passed from the scene, however, Disciples of Christ had come to realize that, though any Christian might properly preach who *could* preach, there was need for a trained ministry and that those who intended to devote their lives to this work should be ordained to the ministry.

Ritualism in worship is a feature of the ancient Christian tradition which was set aside with little argument and no compunctions. If any justification for this was needed, it could easily be found in the fact that the churches in the apostolic period neither used fixed forms of prayer nor practiced what could by any stretch of imagination be called a liturgical type of worship. Primitivism and simplicity always go together. Here the determination to restore so far as possible the worship as well as the faith and ordinances of the primitive church was



reinforced by a preference for informality which was congenial to the temperament and habits of the people among whom the new movement was to make its way. Moreover, a ritualistic form of worship has never been regularly and successfully employed in any church that did not have some generally recognized authority to establish the ritual and to exercise the necessary degree of pressure to insure uniformity in its use. Such uniformity in ritual among the churches of a communion, with a degree of continuity in its use sufficient to give the sense of a deep historic rootage for the forms, is recognized as important by all who use a highly formalized service of worship. It is difficult to imagine these conditions being met in any communion in which the local congregations determine these and all other matters for themselves. So the rejection of an authoritative connexional polity automatically carried with it the rejection of a uniform authorized form of worship.

The quest of the primitive carried with it the neglect, if not the studied rejection, of the aesthetic element in the tradition of the church through the centuries. The term "aesthetic" in this connection must be taken as including both appreciation of the beautiful and sensitivity to those things which appeal to religious feelings. The medieval church had developed rich resources in this field. The sensuous beauty of an elaborate liturgical service was only one feature of this. There was the unintelligible but impressive sonority of the Latin in the mass, the vestments of the priests, the music, the incense, the architecture, the stained glass, the painting and sculpture, the colorful celebration of high days with parades and processions. Even the marvelous legends of the saints, though often affronting the intelligence of the minority who cared to use their intelligence, had been a powerful stimulus to the imagination. All these made potent appeal to the religious feelings of men and women who were not able, or were not permitted, to apply any criteria of reason to their faith, and served to bind them in loyalty to the institution which provided such agreeable stirring of their emotions. Protestantism from the outset swept away the greater part of this material and concentrated its attention on religious ideas that could be stated in propositions and defended by texts and arguments.



It has often been charged that the Protestants who smashed the statues and the stained-glass windows in some of the old Catholic churches that they took over did this because they "hated beauty." This is not true. They did it for the same reason that the Catholic conquerors of Mexico destroyed the Aztec temples, carvings, and manuscripts, that is, because they believed that these things were symbols of false religious ideas and that the religious feelings they evoked were the wrong kind of feelings directed toward the wrong objects of devotion. While this exonerates the Protestants from the general charge of hating beauty, it still leaves incontestable the fact that Protestantism was suspicious of any appeal to emotion that was not clearly related to valid religious ideas. It was hesitant, and not very successful, in adopting new symbols to replace the old. It realized how easy it is for the aesthetic to become a substitute for the religious, and for elaborated ceremonials and celebrations with ostensibly religious intent to become mere popular festivals in the minds of most of those who enjoy them. For a modern parallel, consider Christmas shopping and the Easter parade in relation to two great days in the Christian calendar which, for this very reason, Protestants long refused to recognize.

There is a higher level within the general area of what may properly be called the aesthetic aspect of religion. This is mysticism—itself a somewhat vague word the denotation and connotation of which have ill-defined boundaries. Whatever may be the reach of its meaning, it certainly is not primarily concerned with the appreciation of beauty or with the utilization of any of the arts to stimulate religious emotions. These things have an objective reference to things apprehended by the physical senses. Mysticism, at least in its pure form, professes its independence of such sensory stimuli, though it often expresses its findings in terms of sensory imagery. In any case it is "aesthetic" in the sense of emphasizing feeling rather than intellect, and it regards feeling as a way of knowing. "I know it because I feel it" is a typical mystical slogan. Roman Catholicism has had an extensive tradition of mysticism and has produced a notable body of mystical literature, some of which has become part of the universal Christian heritage of devotional literature. Protestantism has never denied the importance of feeling in the re-

ligious life, and at times—as in the great Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, of which Methodism was the most conspicuous and enduring feature—it has appealed to “feeling” with highly beneficial results. But, except in the heat of “revival” efforts, Protestantism has been suspicious of strong emotionalism and of the more extreme mystics and has leaned toward the view that what is (or seems to be) apprehended through a surge of feeling needs to be checked by intellectual processes in more tranquil hours.

Because they were more Protestant than most other Protestants, and because they lived and worked on the frontier where the hard conditions of survival left little room for anything but the basic and indisputable essentials, Disciples of Christ in their early days neglected all these aspects of the aesthetic. Their message was one that could be stated in propositions and defended by texts and arguments. It would be wholly unfair to them to say, as their opponents often said, that they were without religious emotions, or that their religion was “all head and no heart.” This misconception arose from the Reformers’ vigorous protest against what they believed to be a current misuse of the emotions. They knew and valued the experience of worship, and that includes emotion. They stressed the necessity of repentance, which includes a godly sorrow for sin as well as an act of will in determining to forsake it. They knew and prized the joy of salvation. They felt an intense enthusiasm for promoting the cause to which they were devoted, which was the conversion of men and the unification of the church. But their primary quest was for truth, and they distrusted feeling as either an organ of knowledge or a criterion of truth. They criticized the revivalistic methods of some of the contemporaries, especially the Methodists and Baptists, who seemed to regard “mourning” for one’s sins and fear of hell as the first step toward conversion, a “feeling” that the Holy Spirit had visited the mourner to give him faith as the next step, and a “feeling” of joy and triumph over the world, the flesh, and the devil as proof that the process of salvation had been completed. This misuse of emotion was, to be sure, no part of the classical Protestant tradition, much less of the older Christian heritage. Rather, it was one of the bizarre deviations of frontier revivalism. It had, however, gained such

wide currency in the regions where early Disciples were doing their work that its rejection was a significant feature in their critical attitude toward their heritage.

As to methods of worship and the general arrangements for carrying on the work of the church, it is to be remembered that most of our fathers in the first and second generations of the movement were plain people who felt more at home in informal situations, whether in church or out, than in ornate surroundings and ceremonial procedures. Only a few had much familiarity with the refinements of the older culture. Alexander Campbell was indeed a "pioneer in broadcloth" with a cultivated taste for some of the elegances in his personal life, but in his view church buildings should be as plain as the services that were held in them. He could speak critically of churches that indulged in the sinful and extravagant luxury of building "great cathedrals costing forty thousand dollars," though one might have supposed that architecture would have been the least objectionable of the arts for the church to employ. This generalization about early Disciples being "plain people" must not be pressed to the extreme. It was true of the pioneer stage, but the frontier was constantly moving westward along an irregular front and leaving behind it communities in which the crudities of the frontier were rapidly disappearing. In Kentucky and central Tennessee, for example, the pattern of migration had put the development of post-pioneer culture about a generation ahead of other regions west of the Alleghenies. Here there were many who knew the amenities of life, and who held that a man was no worse a Christian for being a gentleman, living in a fine house, wearing good clothes, setting a good table, and driving a good horse. These could still feel that an atmosphere of friendly and informal cordiality in the church was more in harmony with "New Testament simplicity" than any more formal and stately procedure could be.

In summary, it may be said that the founding fathers of Disciples of Christ and their immediate successors neglected, where they did not purposefully and on principle reject, the aesthetic element of the total Christian heritage, if "aesthetic" is taken in the comprehensive sense that has been suggested.

Is it "accentuating the negative" to dwell so long and in so

much detail upon the fact that our fathers rejected many things that came down to them as features of the common Christian heritage? Not at all. Every rejection was the affirmation of the opposite of that which was rejected. These men followed the dictates of a very simple logic which told them that, if a given proposition is true, then its contradictory must be false. Affirmation and denial necessarily went together. With the gaining of new insights into religious truth and duty came the inevitable repudiation of whatever seemed to be inconsistent with them.

In discussing, as we have been doing thus far in this chapter, the parts of their heritage which our fathers rejected, we have been compelled to anticipate in some degree the affirmations which demanded these negations. Not all these affirmations had the novelty that was sometimes claimed for them, but taken together they constituted a program unprecedented in Christian history. They became, in the aggregate, the contribution of our founding fathers to the total heritage which had come to them and through them to us.

Putting it in a condensed and synoptic form, we may say that their contribution was:

1. A new emphasis on the unity of the church.
2. A plan for restoring the unity of the church by restoring "the ancient order of things," including
  - (a) The essentials of the original polity, worship, message, and methods of the church as shown in the New Testament;
  - (b) The original conditions of membership in the church and fellowship among Christians.

There was nothing new about the idea that the church ought to be united. The general horror of schism equaled the fear and hatred of heresy. This, as we have said before, was the normal and almost universal conviction of nearly all Christians until modern times. Almost equally universal through all those long centuries was the conviction that the unity of the church consisted in submission to a centralized authority and conformity to the standards of doctrine, worship, and behavior approved by that authority, and that the way to get it was to impose penalties, up to and including death, upon those who did not so submit



and conform. This was made possible by two things: first, the alliance of the church with the state in such a way that the police power of the state was at the service of the church for the enforcement of penalties upon those whom the church condemned; second, the church's development of a system of courts of its own and what amounted to an ecclesiastical police force. By the ruthless use of these means, a fair degree of church unity was maintained in Western Europe through the Middle Ages. After the successful Protestant revolt in several countries in Northern Europe, the national state churches practiced a similar system within their respective jurisdictions, though with the actual power in the hands of the civil government. So Thomas Campbell's famous declaration that "the church is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one" has no novelty whatever when viewed against the background of the whole history of the church. It had, however, the quality of novelty when it was projected into the American scene where the old program of unity by compulsion had been completely abandoned and where almost all Christians were happy in the enjoyment of religious liberty, which necessarily included the liberty to divide. Thus when our founding fathers sounded their note for a united church without compulsion, they were adding to their heritage a novel and original feature.

Such a revolutionary proposal as unity without compulsion could win no converts unless accompanied by a plausible plan for accomplishing what had hitherto been deemed impossible. They had a plan which, they believed, could not fail if divided Christendom would adopt it. This plan, in its simplest formulation, was "the restoration of the ancient order of things," or, as it came to be more frequently stated, "the restoration of primitive Christianity." The argument appeared to be unanswerable. The primitive church, that is, the church in the days of the apostles, was undivided. The New Testament tells us all we can ever know, and all we need to know, about that church. To quote again Thomas Campbell's often-quoted words: "The New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and govern-

ment of the Old Testament Church and the particular duties of its members." If, then, we will restore all the features of the primitive church which the New Testament records, its unity will automatically be restored. Division must have a cause and unity must have a basis. The cause of division has been departure from or addition to the pattern revealed in the New Testament. The basis of unity must be that pattern. The plan for restoring unity is to restore that pattern and bring the modern church into conformity with it.

The idea of restoring lost features of primitive Christianity was not new. The idea of defending or restoring the unity of the church was not new. But the idea of making the first of these the instrument for accomplishing the second was new. This is a gross oversimplification of the fathers' thinking and of their program of action. It requires qualification and elaboration, especially in regard to their changing concepts as to just what it was that must be restored as the basis of union. But it is perhaps as adequate as any brief and broad statement on the subject can be.

It has been said many times that what Disciples proposed was "not a reformation but a restoration." The distinction has little substance. Every attempted reformation of the church has been in some sense an attempted restoration, either by reviving neglected features or by clearing away accretions and corruptions, or both. It could easily be shown that this was true of the great reformers. The great creeds have been compilations of what was believed to be the main substance of Christian truth as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. The great theologians have put into systematic form what they regarded as biblical teaching together with its necessary implications—all considered to be, of course, "the faith once delivered unto the saints" and hence to be the true and original faith of the church which, in so far as it has been lost or perverted, should be restored.

There have also been many reformers who, without prejudice, may be called "little reformers," because their movements never got off the ground and so never gained any recognizable place in history. In England and Scotland in the eighteenth century there were dozens of these—earnest and sincere men who, perhaps quite independently and without knowing of one another's

projects, saw that the churches around them, with their clerical dignitaries, powerful ecclesiastical organizations, and elaborate rituals, were quite unlike anything they could learn about in the New Testament. So they would cull out the texts that seemed in any way relevant to this matter and, by making a mosaic of these, construct a picture of the primitive church. Assuming then that this represented the faith and practice of the church as the apostles wanted it to be, and that the apostles had been instructed as to how Jesus wanted it to be, and that whatever was done with apostolic approval in any church was a binding precedent for all churches forever, the obvious duty of the hour was to bring the church today into conformity with that pattern. One writer claims to have identified more than forty movements of this kind within the century. I have never found so many, but they were numerous. Some of them never had more than one congregation. Some died with their founders. None lasted long, and none had the power of reproduction to the degree requisite to the production of viable offspring. One of the few that produced any literature was that initiated by John Glas and later led by his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman. (This was the movement of which Professor Whitsitt accused Disciples of being an "off-shoot.") There were probably never more than a dozen congregations of this order, including the one in London of which the famous chemist, Michael Faraday, was a member and the one in Danbury, Connecticut, where Robert Sandeman died.

The similar movement led and financed by the brothers Haldane had a traceable historical connection with Disciples of Christ. Its restoration principle, identical with that of Sandeman, was clearly stated in the title of a book by James Haldane: *A View of the Social Worship and Ordinances Observed by the First Christians, Drawn from the Scriptures alone; Being an Attempt to Enforce their Divine Obligation; and to Represent the Guilty and Evil Consequences of Neglecting them.* If this leaves any doubt, it may be dissolved by noting the full title of the first chapter: "There is reason to presume that the New Testament furnishes instructions concerning every part of the worship and conduct of Christian societies, as well as concerning the faith and practice of individuals." The title of the second



chapter adds: "All Christians are bound to observe the universal and approved practices of the first churches recorded in Scripture." This book was published in 1805.

We must note not only the fact that these men put all their energies into meticulously restoring every detail of practice and procedure for which they could find an approved precedent in the earliest churches (assuming that what was approved must therefore be universal), but also the fact that they had no idea of presenting this program as a basis for a united church. For them it was enough that they should be right and let who would be wrong. Theirs was the typical sectarian attitude of men who, having laid hold of an idea that seems to them to have saving power, run off into a corner with it and gather around them a little coterie to nurse their idea. The character of such a movement is virtually the same if its protagonists have the energy and persuasiveness to win a considerable following. Whether the resulting communion is small or large, if its animating motive is solely to reproduce all the details of what they think is an authoritative pattern and to separate themselves from all who do not agree with them, such a movement is a sect and its influence is on the side of further dividing the church, not on the side of those who would promote its unification.

Our founding fathers were doing nothing new when they took restoration as one of their principles and slogans, and they were embarking on a course which might easily lead to complete frustration. But they had also another conviction, another motive, and another slogan which had the power to save them from being bogged down in the petty sectarianism which is characteristic of the kind of restorationism of which we have been speaking. That is to say, it could save from this fate as many of them and their successors as were willing to permit this other conviction and objective to modify (but not to extinguish) their interpretation of the restoration principle. This saving conviction was that the church's most serious departure from the mind of Christ was its division into sects always competing and often warring with one another with unbrotherly bitterness. An aversion to the "horrid evil" of sectarianism, based on the belief that loyalty to Christ required unity and fellowship among all his followers, became the ruling motive of their enterprise in its



farthest reaching intention. Since complete unity was obviously a remote objective, and since restoration was conceived as the means of attaining unity, it was natural that attention should be turned almost immediately to developing the idea of restoration. After the first fine rapture over the divine imperative to unify the church had found expression in those two classic manifestos, *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* and the *Declaration and Address*, the emphasis on unity was temporarily eclipsed by other interests: in the "Christian Churches" of Kentucky and adjoining states, by a warm evangelism of an undenominational character with a somewhat Methodist tone; in the work of the Campbells and Scott, by intensive study of the implications of restoration.

This earnest quest for the meaning of restoration in terms of the precise ideas and practices which the church should adopt in imitation of the earliest churches was foreshadowed in the statement, by Thomas Campbell in his *Postscript* to the *Declaration and Address*, that there remained "two things of apparently great importance for promoting the grand object" of the Christian Association:

The first of these is a catechetical exhibition of the fulness and precision of the holy scriptures upon the entire subject of christianity—an exhibition of that complete system of faith and duty expressly contained in the sacred oracles; respecting the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the christian church.

Nothing further was ever said and nothing was ever done about the "catechetical exhibition," but there was little delay in beginning the search to find what was implied in restoring primitive Christianity as described in Scripture. The program that resulted from this search involved, *first*, a system of polity, procedure, and worship for the church, and *second*, a method of presenting the gospel and bringing people into the church. The first of these, which was largely the work of Alexander Campbell, was what Walter Scott called "a particular ecclesiastical order." The second, formulated by Scott on principles already laid down by Campbell, was what Scott called the "Ancient Gospel," or "The Gospel Restored." The first determined the actual characteristics of the churches which became allied with the new movement or which sprang up from the

evangelistic efforts of its advocates. The second provided the terms upon which persons should be admitted to membership in the church and therefore to full Christian fellowship. These terms were: faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, on the basis of evidence provided in Scripture; repentance of the believer's personal sins; and baptism, the immersion of the penitent believer upon his profession of such faith.

It will be observed that nothing whatever was said about the many theological issues upon which the creeds of Christendom had made their pronouncements. Our fathers held that all these were matters of "human opinion." Opinions can differ, even when all the variant opinions are believed by those who hold them to have scriptural authority. Such differences of interpretation are within the scope of the individual's Christian liberty and should not be grounds for the division of the church into sects, or for limiting Christian fellowship to those who hold identical opinions. Here they were speaking as the apostles of Christian unity.

As a matter of fact there was a good deal of implicit theology in the propositions and programs which were set forth as nothing more than the restoring of primitive Christianity and the Ancient Gospel "with no admixture of human opinion." Neither Campbell's "particular ecclesiastical order" nor Scott's "Gospel Restored" appealed to the great body of American Christian as having the explicit and indisputable sanction of Holy Scripture and as being therefore the perfect pattern of a united church. But they did appeal to a sufficient number of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, and still more of the previously unconverted, to provide a rapidly growing membership for what was virtually a new denomination pleading for the abolition of denominationalism. The central principle of unity upon simple loyalty to Jesus Christ had become overlaid with opinions and interpretations which converted what was designed to be a union movement on an ecumenical basis into a denomination with its own distinctive ethos and mores.

# V

## *The Denomination They Built*

THE TRADITIONAL refusal of Disciples of Christ to think of themselves as constituting a denomination, or to permit others to apply that term to them without filing such protest as the circumstances might permit, has been the symbol of a valid idea. It has been a way of testifying that they were not complacent about the denominational system, that it was no part of their primary intention to add to the number of denominations, and that they held it to be a matter of central importance to promote the unity of the church. The Protestant Episcopal Church has inherited from its Anglican kinsmen a similar aversion to being classed as simply one among many denominations, and for a reason similar to that which has led most Disciples to reject the term. They also have borne constant testimony to the conviction that the church is essentially one. It is not surprising if some of them have carried this testimony to the point of regarding themselves as constituting the church (at least so far as non-Roman Western Christianity is concerned) while all other communions are mere sects separated from the church. It is no part of our responsibility either to criticize or to defend the Episcopal attitude. Both Episcopalians and Disciples, each having a concern for the unity of the church and each convinced that its own distinctive position is the rallying-point at which the scattered Christian forces should unite, sometimes give to others the impression of making odious claims to su-

periority over those denominations that frankly called themselves that.

Whatever they might call themselves and for however good a reason, Disciples of Christ actually did become a denomination as soon as they became a recognizably distinct group with a name by which they could be denominated. They became a denomination arguing against denominationalism. They never claimed to be the whole church, but they did claim to be within the church which they hoped to unite. They were a part of the church proclaiming that the church ought not to be divided into parts. In short, they became a denomination. During the almost one hundred and fifty years since they became a separate religious body with distinguishing characteristics and a concern for their own unity as well as for the unity of the whole church, they have increasingly become a strong, efficient, and respected denomination. The fact that they did not become *only* a denomination made them a denomination of a special kind.

The restoration slogan was at first proposed on the assumption that it would provide a platform of unquestionable validity on which all sincere Christians could agree and unite. The authenticity and sufficiency of this program were believed to be self-evident to any honest reader of the Bible. It is more easily seen now than it was then that the total program of the "Reformers," and of the churches in the movement which they initiated, was not one which all sincere and fairly intelligent Christians could reasonably be expected to accept. It was not a transcript of the mind of Christ for his church, "with no admixture of human opinion." It involved many opinions in which large numbers of earnest and intelligent Christians did not concur then and do not concur now, and some opinions which are accepted by only a small fraction of the total number of Christians. These opinions may be right. So may the opinions expressed in any one of the historic creeds of the church which the fathers rejected because they were opinions only.

Some of the disputable opinions which determined the structure, the functioning, and the dominant strain of thought in the new denomination that was in process of formation were these: that the church of the apostolic age had a uniform and divinely



authorized form of organization; that this form is a mandatory pattern for the church for all time; that the New Testament gives an unmistakable picture of this pattern; that congregational autonomy is an essential feature of it; that theological agreement is not a condition of Christian fellowship; that the church has no legislative body with power to fix doctrinal standards, and therefore the church should not and cannot have an official theology but should relegate all such matters of opinion and speculation to the area of the individual Christian's liberty; that faith is possible for any person, not for the "elect" only, and that saving faith is based on evidence and need not wait for a special enabling act of the Holy Spirit; that membership in the church is limited to baptized (immersed) penitent believers.

In addition to these positions, certain other methods and mores became universal among Disciples and, in combination, became distinctive of them. Some of these were: observance of the Lord's Supper every Sunday; the giving of the invitation at the end of every sermon; an informal, nonliturgical form of worship; the holding of conventions of the mass-meeting type on scales ranging from district to (in recent years) world-wide.

No one who enters the membership of a church of this denomination is asked to affirm his approval of all these practices and customs or the opinions upon which they rest. One is asked only—usually in the words of Matthew 16:16—"Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God?" The affirmative answer to this is regarded not as a theological proposition but as the expression of a personal attitude of acceptance. It is equivalent to the declaration that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3), which many believe to have been the only confession of faith required in the churches of the apostolic age. This is the bond of unity of Disciples of Christ considered as a movement advocating the union of all Christians in the one church, as it must also be the bond of unity of that one church.

One who becomes a member of a congregation which is one of the "Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)" is not, however, affiliating only with a movement advocating Christian unity on these broadly comprehensive terms. He is also becoming a member of a specific group having the special characteristics of polity and practice that have been mentioned. These are not

articles of faith. They could be modified. Some of them have been modified and others may be modified hereafter, or even abandoned. But so long as there is a general conformity with these patterns of procedure, these are among the bonds of unity of the movement as a denomination.

It is neither a contradiction nor a calamity that Disciples of Christ must act in these two roles—as a denomination with such institutional structure and unity as will enable it to do a share of the whole church's total task proportionate to its numbers and resources, and to give its message some impact on the Christian world; and as a movement in advocacy of Christian unity on a basis that does not include its own distinguishing denominational characteristics. This is the kind of inevitable paradox that must confront any group whose purpose includes the quest of a goal the attainment of which will require its own disappearance. This is the "dialectic" of a denomination working for a unity which will transcend the denominational system. We must consider now some phases of the development of the denomination and some of the tensions that arose in the application of the restoration idea out of which its denominational manners and customs grew.

The first and most pressing duty of those who committed themselves to this new movement was that of converting the unconverted—that is, evangelism. This is always and everywhere a phase of the duty of the church, because Christianity is in its essential nature a religion the blessings of which are to be not merely cherished and enjoyed by those who have them but also offered to those who do not have them and shared with all who will receive them. It was an especially pressing duty in America in the early years of the nineteenth century because at that time the membership of all the churches together was such a small percent of the population. At the time of the first federal census, in 1790, the figure could not have been above seven per cent. By 1830 it had perhaps risen to fifteen per cent, but it could scarcely have been above that. The church had to win and enlist even the children of its own members, for the European system by which children automatically became members of the church of their parents (which for the great majority was the state church) did not exist in America. Voluntary mem-

bership and voluntary financial support of the church were features of the denominational system. For the American churches the alternative to evangelism was extinction. The missionary motive to convert the unconverted in order to save them was therefore reinforced by the necessity for the church to make converts in order to save itself. All denominations felt this pressure, though their methods of evangelism were not identical.

Disciples of Christ experienced these two motives. As ardent Christians, they wanted to save souls. As participants in a new reformatory movement, they wanted to win converts to that movement. Since their field of work was on the frontier where revivalistic methods were viewed with favor and brought the largest results, their evangelism took the form of direct and constant appeal to the unconverted. Since, however, their ideas of the nature of faith and of the process of conversion were considerably at variance with those of the revivalists of their time and a little earlier, their evangelism had a characteristically different quality. While not dispensing with the elements of exhortation and ardent appeal to the emotions, it was basically rational and argumentative. Walter Scott was the principal artificer of this method. His faith-repentance-and-baptism formula has already been sufficiently described. Even before Scott's spectacular success in northeastern Ohio, "Raccoon" John Smith and one or two others in Kentucky, using a very similar method derived from the teachings of Alexander Campbell, had been far more successful in evangelism than Campbell himself ever was. These campaigns of Scott and Smith (and not at all the emotionalism and ecstasies of the Cane Ridge revival) set the pattern for subsequent Disciple evangelism.

The success of this type of evangelism is indicated by the rapid growth of the denomination. When it was formed (in 1832) by the confluence of the two streams (Campbell's and Stone's, to put it too simply), it had about 22,000 members. It can be estimated that 10,000 of these came from the "Christian Churches" which separated from the Presbyterians in 1804, and 12,000 from the Baptist churches in Ohio and Kentucky which, having recently had their membership quadrupled by the preaching of the "Reformers," had become churches of Disciples in and about 1830. By 1840 the total number had grown to



40,000; by 1850, to 118,000; by 1860, to 192,000. In 1870, in spite of an intervening Civil War, the number had become about 350,000. Taking the 22,000 in 1832 as a base, it will be seen that in the succeeding forty years the number of Disciples of Christ had been multiplied by sixteen, while the population of the United States had been multiplied by three. Religious statistics are notoriously inaccurate, but these are careful estimates and they cannot be so far from the truth as to leave any doubt that Disciples of Christ were enjoying a very healthy growth during the first forty years of their denominational existence. In the hundred years from 1860 to 1960, their number was, approximately, multiplied by ten—in spite of the loss of an ultraconservative element now statistically separate as “Churches of Christ” and claiming more members than Disciples of Christ and twice as many congregations.

There was a time when some of the more optimistic Disciples believed that their movement would take the world by sheer geometrical progression. If its membership could increase at a percentage rate five times that of the population increase, it was only a matter of arithmetic to tell how many years it would be before membership equaled population. This kind of extrapolation, always conjectural and generally fallacious, took no account of the inevitable leveling off of the curve of percentage increase as the base becomes larger, or of the fact that other religious bodies also were increasing faster than the population. This statistical folly has long since become obsolete. It has been rendered so by the stark fact that Disciples of Christ are not now (if they ever were) the fastest growing religious body. They might have grown faster if they had been content to be only a denomination. They might even have escaped the rift in their own body if, like the Bourbons, “forgetting nothing and learning nothing,” they had been willing to perpetuate unchanged the denominational patterns with which they started and reduce their plea for unity to an invitation to other Christians to adopt their manners and opinions. But even without stubbornly refusing to learn anything their fathers did not know, Disciples of Christ have been reasonably successful as a denomination in the matter of numerical growth. This is ground for rejoicing, since most Christian work still has to be done through denomi-



national agencies. The stronger Disciples of Christ are numerically, the more of it they can do; and, at the same time, the more people they can reach with their distinctive message—which is that the denominational system is not the highest or the ultimate form of collective Christian life.

Both home and foreign missions are among those kinds of Christian work which at present are done chiefly by denominational agencies. They meet an obligation which the church owes to the world and build strength, morale, and prestige for the denomination. Every denomination, therefore, has a responsibility both to its Lord and to itself to be active in these fields. Home missions may, for the most part, be brought under the category of evangelism. It is a process by which the church, or a denomination, strengthens itself by gaining new members and establishing new congregations while at the same time it is conferring blessings upon the persons who are won as members and the communities in which the new congregations are established. Again, like mercy as Portia viewed it, “it blesses him that gives and him that takes.” Foreign missions are more explicitly and unselfishly a contribution to the welfare of others. It is true that here also there is a reflex benefit to the sending churches, but it is safe to say that this benefit comes in its fulness only to those whose motivation includes no thought of what they may get out of it.

The beginning of home missions by Disciples of Christ was not a planned project. In the nature of the case it could not be that. No person or group had either the authority to make or the slightest intention of making any such plan. The new denomination had no ecclesiastical machinery by which to stimulate, direct, or co-ordinate any missionary efforts that might be made by local churches. Moreover, there was a troubling doubt as to whether strict conformity to the pattern of the apostolic church would permit any sort of organization other than the independent local churches for missionary purposes or for any other purpose. This question later became the crucial issue in a long, bitter, and divisive controversy, the unhappy results of which still continue.

Nevertheless, in the first two decades (roughly, the 30's and 40's) there was a very limited amount of co-operation among

neighboring churches to send preachers to evangelize in their districts. If, said someone, one congregation can provide an evangelist but cannot furnish him with a horse on which to make the rounds, and another congregation can provide a horse but not the evangelist to use it, surely it would not be out of the way for these two churches to collaborate to this extent in doing together what neither of them could do separately. This imaginary episode was an argument, in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*, used by those who favored co-operation to silence the caviling of those who opposed it. It did not touch the point that presently became a divisive issue. There was never any serious objection to occasional and episodic co-operation between two congregations or among several. What those who became the opponents of co-operation were really afraid of was the organization of conventions or societies or other unscriptural permanent structures which would either take over functions which were properly those of the church alone, or else impose their control upon what should be autonomous congregations by assuming the status of authoritative bodies within the structure of the church itself. There was plenty of support for such apprehensions in the writing of Alexander Campbell in his *Christian Baptist* period (1823-1830). At that time he was chiefly busied with castigating the errors of the "sects" and developing the details of that "particular ecclesiastical order" which he found depicted in the New Testament. After 1830 and especially after 1832, he found himself the trusted counselor and unofficial leader of a body of churches on which devolved the double duty of converting the unconverted and propagating the special cause that made them a separate denomination. In this changed situation he could see that it was not enough merely to reproduce as accurately as possible the polity and methods of the earliest churches. He did not abandon the restoration formula, but he dealt with it more freely and with some awareness that in the interest of efficiency in the modern world the church might need to adopt some methods for which there was no precise command in the apostolic teaching or precedent in the apostolic church. This might mean not only co-operation among the churches in spreading the gospel but also organizations, such as conventions and societies, to promote and stabilize such co-operation.

The real issue, then, from the beginning of the "denominational existence" (Campbell's own phrase) of Disciples of Christ was the manner and spirit in which the idea of "restoring primitive Christianity" should be interpreted and applied. It took a little time for the majority of the leaders of the movement to decide that it did not inhibit the use of some forms of permanent organization for co-operation among the churches. Some made the contrary decision.

Since this issue was in its first phase of discussion in the two decades after the merging of the two streams which Disciples recognize as their sources, it may be noted that before that merger the "Christian Churches" of Kentucky and adjacent states, of which Stone was by 1830 the elder statesman and outstanding leader, had been highly suspicious of any organization that might have the least flavor of "ecclesiasticism." There are contemporary reports of "annual meetings of the elders and brethren" of certain areas, and even of "conferences," but the same documents indicate clearly that the entire agenda of these meetings consisted of the exchange of information about the progress of the cause in the various communities, followed by a period "devoted exclusively to the social worship of the Lord." These churches had nothing whatever that could be called "co-operative work," much less any permanent organizations for carrying it on.

In spite of the reluctance of many and the opposition of a few, Disciples began to hold conventions and to form societies. The details have been recorded elsewhere. State conventions and state missionary societies in a few states preceded the first national convention (Cincinnati, 1849) and the organization of the American Christian Missionary Society with Alexander Campbell as its president. These societies, both state and national, actually contributed very little to the growth of the denomination during the first two or three decades of their existence. The numbers had nearly doubled in the eight years before 1840, and that was before there were any missionary societies. That doubled figure was almost tripled between 1840 and 1850, and the few fragmentary societies that existed had done practically nothing in that decade. The next decade showed an increase of more than sixty per cent, but the societies, though there were now several more of them, were still doing so little



that such statistics about their work as are available seem absurd.

Indiana furnishes a good example, and its case was not unique. The Indiana Christian Home Missionary Society (organized in 1849, three weeks before the first national convention) reported a total of \$33.95 received in 1855, plus \$25 to help in building a church in Chicago. There had been state conventions for several years before the society was formed, but the most the conventions had done was to urge the churches to send out evangelists. Many had done so, and a good deal of work was done by "county co-operations." Yet, with almost no systematic promotion the growth in Indiana had been remarkable. When Mr. Campbell visited the state in 1850 he reported the impression that "our Indiana brethren are second only to the Methodists in number, wealth, and influence." This may or may not have been an accurate estimate, but it is certain that Disciples had increased very greatly in numbers, and probably also in wealth and influence, and that work through their missionary societies up to this time and considerably later had had very little to do with it. The antisociety people did not fail to add this pragmatic argument to the scriptural argument in their opposition to religious organizations other than the local churches.

Almost all of the actual work of home missions which made Disciples of Christ a successful and expanding denomination had been done by local congregations, by informal co-operations of neighboring churches and, perhaps most of all, by zealous individuals who went out on their own initiative and at their own expense or at least at their own risk of finding support on the field. The population was moving westward into the great open spaces, and towns were springing up behind the advancing edge of the frontier. Many an ardent layman took his religion with him on his migration and became the nucleus of a new church. The status of laymen in this movement and the indistinct line between laymen and ministers made this possible among Disciples as it would not have been in some other communions. Preachers also could and did go forth as evangelists, neither "called" nor sent except by the call of needy fields and the divine imperative to "Go." Some went into neighboring communities, some took the longer trail to farther and newer places. There



were two congregations in California within two years after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill. Even earlier, in 1846, there were two churches in Oregon. In these and other states where the first seeds were planted by individual volunteers, conventions and missionary societies were soon formed which played an increasingly important part in promoting the total enterprise.

The author's intention is not to play down the significance of such organizations in the life of Disciples, for it has indeed been very great, but only to make clear the historical fact that they did not have the key role in transforming a "movement" with a few leaders fired by apostolic zeal and a few converts following their lead into a strong denomination with a nationwide constituency. If we knew in detail how it came about that Christian churches were found all over the Roman Empire within a century after the beginning of Christianity, or even how, for example, it happened that Paul "found brethren" at Puteoli when he landed at that south Italian village after his tempestuous voyage toward Rome, we would probably find that the process of the church's initial expansion was much the same—not by a planned strategy but by the unco-ordinated activity of independent individuals.

Foreign missions can scarcely be carried on, or even initiated, by such random procedure under the conditions of the modern world. Distances and expense are too great, the language barrier is too serious an obstacle, and the possibilities of self-support or of living on the land are too meagre. For a foreign mission to have any promise of continuance long enough to produce any results, there must be a sufficiently stable base of supplies in the home churches. This requirement points toward either a permanent organization of churches which becomes in effect a feature of the denomination's polity, or a society with a voluntary membership composed of individuals or churches. The foreign missionary impulse came to Disciples when their movement was still very young. This impulse had lately arisen in the Protestant churches in England and America, and the great era of modern missions had just begun. William Carey had gone to India (1793), Adoniram Judson to Burma (1812), Robert Morrison to China (1807), Robert Moffatt to Africa (1816), followed by his son-in-law, David Livingstone (1840). Every

one of these missionary trail breakers was backed by a missionary society.

It was not merely a desire to imitate the other denominations that moved Disciples of Christ to organize a missionary society and send missionaries abroad. It was the recognition of a duty which other communions, being older, had recognized a little sooner. The gospel as they understood it, the "gospel restored," must be sent abroad, and there was no way of sending it except to organize a society. Dr. J. T. Barclay, a graduate in medicine from the University of Pennsylvania, suggested Jerusalem as the most appropriate field and offered to go. A national convention was held at Cincinnati in October, 1849. It had been expected that the convention would be composed of delegates selected by the churches, but relatively few churches sent delegates. The persons who attended were a very representative group, but few of them brought any credentials, so the convention became a mass meeting. It organized the American Christian Missionary Society for the promotion of both home and foreign missions, and the Society sent Dr. Barclay to Jerusalem. This was almost the only thing it did until after the Civil War. The Jerusalem effort was not a success and Dr. Barclay returned after four years. A Negro slave, Alexander Cross, was bought, freed, given some training and sent as a missionary to Liberia in 1853. The spur to this effort was doubtless the movement to colonize American Negroes in Africa, by which means many benevolent persons hoped to solve the slavery problem peacefully. Cross died of a fever after two years, and this mission also ended in nothing. Meanwhile the opposition of the strict restorationists to societies of any kind was becoming more decided and was winning a larger following. By reason of this opposition, the failure of the Society's first efforts, and the Civil War with its aftermath of confusion, the foreign missionary cause languished until the 1870's. By 1870 Disciples had more than 300,000 members and not a single missionary on foreign soil. That they were evangelistic, no one could doubt, but the evidence strongly suggests, if it does not actually prove, that they were chiefly interested in winning converts and saving souls under conditions that would add to the numbers and strength of their own body. It is perhaps not without significance that

converts from the world and proselytes from other religious bodies were commonly spoken of as "additions."

The cause of foreign missions received an infusion of new life with the organization of the Christian Woman's Board of Missions (1874) and the Foreign Christian Missionary Society (1875). The inauguration of the women's work was an event of incalculable value, both for the women themselves and for the denomination as a whole. The women's society did work both at home and abroad. The old American Christian Missionary Society, relieved of responsibility for the foreign work which it had never made any serious attempt to do, thereafter confined itself to home missions and gradually became much more efficient. The very existence of the new Foreign Society drew increased attention to that phase of Christian expansion. However, after these two societies had been functioning for several years, the missions abroad were still only to Christians in other countries—to Christians in British Jamaica, to Anglicans and others in England, to Catholics in Paris, to Armenians in Turkey; and plans were afoot for sending missionaries to the Catholics in Italy and the Lutherans in Germany. The most obvious explanation of this concentration of all foreign missionary activity upon Christians is that Disciples of Christ have always believed that they have a mission to the Christian world as well as to the unconverted, and at this period the emphasis of their collective effort was upon winning the members of other churches to their program of restoring the simplicity and the pattern of primitive Christianity. From the pitifully meagre financial support that was given to this work it can be reasonably inferred that, though the leaders considered this the wise policy at the time, the members of the churches had little interest in it. The total income of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society for 1880, after it had existed for five years, was approximately \$13,000, or less than five cents per capita for the total membership of the churches.

A second infusion of new life for the foreign enterprise came when, in 1880, simultaneously with the invention of "Children's Day for Foreign Missions," came the demand that the children's contributions be used to send the gospel "to people who did not know about Jesus." That meant missions to non-Christian



countries. The suggestion seems to have come at the right moment. Its adoption lifted the missionary enterprise to a different level and immediately multiplied manifold the resources made available for this work. Missionaries were sent to India in 1882, to Japan in 1883, to China in 1886, to the Congo in 1897.

Nothing has been more significant in the emergence of Disciples from a cramping concentration upon their own peculiarities than their entrance seriously into the missionary enterprise and their co-operation with other religious bodies in the promotion of this work as soon as co-operation became possible. They did not, either at home or abroad, lose the sense of their special message and mission, but as they stood shoulder to shoulder with other Christians confronting non-Christian religions and cultures, they came to a better understanding of what their message is to the Christian as well as to the non-Christian world. This is one of the areas in which they learned how to function as a good denomination without becoming just another denomination.

Since the intent of this book is to present an interpretation, rather than a narrative, of the history of Disciples of Christ, no attempt will be made to record the details of that history. As to the development of their missionary work, both home and foreign, and of the organizations that were formed for its promotion, little more need be said than that, after the not very fruitful early years of the societies that have been mentioned, the growth has been both extensive and substantial. The state societies expanded their functions into other phases of Christian life than that of evangelism and the planting of new churches and won reasonably generous, though never adequate, support as the value of their work became generally recognized. The national organizations for other than missionary purposes—such as the Board of Church Extension, the Pension Plan, and the National Benevolent Association—were able to arrive at the stage of maturity and efficiency with less preliminary trial and error than the earlier societies had needed. Moreover, by the time they were formed the denomination itself had gained some experience in co-operative work and the local congregations had, in a considerable degree, outgrown the parochialism which had hampered the earlier operations. Disciples of Christ had



always felt that they were "a peculiar people," and quite rightly, for they have a message which distinguishes them and, while it cannot prevent them from being a denomination, makes them a different kind of denomination from the others. For this reason a certain clannishness tended to characterize them. Yet in spite of a sense of isolation from other denominations it took time for them to learn to act collectively in the promotion of their own common interests. This lesson is not so easily learned by a people who regard their congregational autonomy and their personal freedom of thought and action as inalienable rights and indispensable aspects of their heritage.

The earliest leaders of Disciples had a keen interest in education. Of the four founding fathers, three were university men. Stone, who never attended a university, had a sound classical education in a private academy which was about on a level with the colleges of the time and whose principal was good enough to be offered the presidency of the University of North Carolina when it was organized. All four of them were teachers for a greater or lesser part of their lives. Two of them became college presidents. Scott was a teacher in Pittsburgh before he became an evangelist in Ohio. Thomas Campbell earned his living throughout his life much more by teaching than by preaching. If the beginning of Disciples is dated from the merger of the two streams in 1832, then it can be said that they founded two colleges within their first two decades and several more in their third. Why this high priority for education, and how did it express and affect their denominational consciousness?

Education was urgent because the men of the first generation on the frontier, having brought with them the culture they had acquired before they came to the frontier, saw that the second generation would grow up in ignorance unless educational institutions were founded. There was need for both an intelligent ministry and an intelligent laity. From the point of view of Disciples, there was no sharp line between these two needs. So they did not found theological seminaries; they founded colleges. Since their program, especially for the restoration of primitive Christianity, depended so directly and textually on the New Testament, the Bible became the most prominent textbook in the colleges and every minister who made any pretensions to scholar-

ship was expected to know Greek. In the absence of statistics, it is a reasonable conjecture that a larger proportion of Disciple ministers could read their Greek New Testaments in 1860 than in 1960. In the founding and control of the colleges, and in the determination of their religious atmosphere, there was another manifestation of that combination of a strong sense of group loyalty with freedom from any centralized ecclesiastical domination. The colleges were specifically "our" colleges. Their presidents and almost all the members of their faculties were of "our people." The influence of the colleges was oriented toward winning the students to "our plea" if they were not already committed to it. For one illustration, which could be multiplied many times: the author's father entered Abingdon College immediately after the Civil War as a cavalry major, a Baptist, and a prospective lawyer with an eye to a political career; he came out a Disciple and a minister, and he began both his ministerial and his editorial career as the associate of the man who had been his professor of Greek in college. The colleges were not only instruments of education; they were also agencies for evangelism and for the propagation of the faith. The churches were proud of the colleges. They were "ours." Their very existence, in an area where all the other denominations were also founding many colleges, proved that Disciples were an intelligent people whose cause did not fear the light of truth and would flourish with the spread of intelligence.

It was a long while before the churches or their more affluent members did much toward supporting their colleges. This was partly because they were slow in learning that it takes money to maintain a good college, and partly because of that same parochial-mindedness which so long prevented Disciples from giving much for anything beyond the boundaries of their own local congregations. Still, the churches were proud of the colleges which they claimed as theirs even while they were letting them starve, and letting many of them die. As to the responsibility for founding, supporting, and controlling these colleges, with rare and late exceptions all this devolved upon volunteer groups of individuals. Here the rugged individualism of Disciples asserted itself. Neither state nor national conventions, neither the societies already existing for missionary or other purposes nor

societies representing the churches organized for this specific purpose ever assumed any responsibility or exercised any control. A college was established when and where a group of interested individuals decided that there ought to be a college. A state convention might give its blessing by passing a resolution, but it seldom gave more than its blessing. The control of the colleges was normally vested in self-perpetuating boards of trustees upon whom devolved the responsibility for supporting and controlling them. The churches as such had really nothing to do with it.

If, as suggested in an earlier chapter, the denotation of the term "our fathers" be limited to those who did most of their work before the end of the nineteenth century, then the interpretation of the attitudes of the fathers toward education and of the part that education played in building the denomination in their time might end about here. At the end of the century the colleges had many loyal alumni in the ministry and a good many among the laity, but it was rather a sentimental than a helpful loyalty. The colleges had given to most of the ministers all the higher education they ever had, for ministerial education was still regarded as an undergraduate operation. We had no graduate seminaries, and any young preacher who might stray beyond the boundaries and do a little studying in a denominational seminary was proceeding at his own risk. Influential voices were raised against the incipient tendency of ambitious students to go to Yale, Union, Harvard, or Chicago to have their education "topped-off in the uncongenial atmosphere of a sectarian university." This was soon to change, but the change was only beginning. The colleges had given the churches the cream of their ministry, but the churches, either as separate congregations or through conventions or societies, had given the colleges next to nothing. They had seemed to expect them to make bricks not only without straw but practically without clay. Even so, they made some good bricks. These colleges had something that cannot be exhibited in terms of statistics of endowment, student enrollment, volumes in the library, Ph.D.'s on the faculty, or academic excellence. With all their obvious defects and incalculable merits, their struggles to survive, and their desperate determination to serve, they not only preserved and transmitted a heritage from the earlier fathers but supplied an



indispensable element of strength in the new denomination that refused to admit that it was one.

Some passing references have been made to the fact that the heirs to the heritage from the Campbells and Stone were not all of one mind in regard to some of the issues that arose as their movement grew in numbers and faced the practical problems which arose. The differences were serious and their consequences momentous. Those that made trouble were never on mere definitions of doctrine but always on matters that led to a choice between alternative courses of action. The problem of maintaining internal unity in a movement professedly dedicated to unity has thus far been insoluble. A plane of cleavage that was visible early in the history of Disciples of Christ had widened, before the close of the nineteenth century, into a complete breach of fellowship. What has been said thus far in this chapter about the development of the denomination has to do only with those on one side of this gulf. Those on the other side would say that the trouble is precisely that Disciples of Christ *have* become a denomination. They have; but so have those on the other side—a very rigid and exclusive Churches-of-Christ denomination.

The movement had begun with two sincere convictions: first, that it was the duty of all Christians to be united in one church on the indisputable basis of loyalty to Jesus as Christ, Son of God and Savior, "with no admixture of human opinion"; second, that the church so united, or on the way to union, should restore the faith and practice which was believed to be clearly revealed in the New Testament. The first of these propositions was never questioned, but the details of the proposed "restoration" provided plenty of room for argument, not only between the "Reformers" and the "sects" but among the Reformers themselves. The very fact that it required argument to prove any specific pattern the right one disqualified it at once as part of the basis for a union that was not to rest on opinions (even correct ones) about disputable matters. And all the items in that "particular ecclesiastical order" which Scott said that Alexander Campbell had drawn from Scripture *were* disputable matters. All the scores, or perhaps hundreds, of debates on "our position" that were held between Disciples and Methodists, Pres-



byterians, and others were attempts to prove what was supposed to be obvious without argument to all who accepted Scripture, as the opponents all did. These debates, and the equally argumentative sermons of the time, convinced a great many, and that was one reason the movement grew so rapidly. It left far more unconvinced, and that was the reason it failed as a movement for union on a basis including this kind of "restoration." Differences of opinion about some of the implications and applications of the restoration principle soon arose within the movement itself, and that was the reason the movement ultimately split into two main divisions.

The first and ultimately the most divisive issue had to do with the organization of missionary societies. In his *Christian Baptist* days Alexander Campbell had criticized the missionary societies then existing on both scriptural and practical grounds. They were not authorized in the New Testament and were therefore no part of the pattern to be restored. They were extravagant in their administration and inefficient in their operation. That was when there was no body of churches looking to him for advice as to how to carry on their promotional and missionary work. When there came to be such a group, he advised them to hold a convention and he became president of the society that convention organized. He had changed from the view that everything is forbidden that is not authorized to the view that whatever is not forbidden is permitted. There was an element among early Disciples who did not follow him in this change. The societies, both national and state, became controversial long before the issue became actually divisive.

While this issue was becoming hot, the "organ question" arose. It would have arisen sooner if organs had been available. This was an old quarrel. While Luther favored the use of the organ in worship, Calvin was as strongly antiorgan as Daniel Sommer or David Lipscomb ever was. Many of the eighteenth-century New England churches had been opposed to instrumental music, though there the instrument in question was the "bass fiddle." The issue was more acute among Disciples because many believed that the restoration of a primitive pattern was of the essence of their distinctive plea. Many opposed the organ who supported the missionary societies, but most of these ultimately

waived their objection. The organ question by itself would never have produced an open break, but it widened the rift that was already opening. W. T. Moore called the years from 1866 to 1875 the period of controversy. It was indeed a period of very little except controversy, and the battles of those years were the more fierce because the combatants, being still within the same communion, could fight at close range. Each party could still cherish the hope of bringing the whole movement to its point of view. Actual separation began in the 1880's, and the division was made a matter of statistical record in 1906 when the federal religious census of that year listed Disciples of Christ and Churches of Christ as two distinct "denominations."

The separation having become a fact of history, other differences developed in the spirit and ethos of the two groups and in the directions of their further change. Among other differentia of less importance, there came to be a sharp contrast between their respective attitudes toward other communions and toward co-operative work with them. It became a mark of the Churches of Christ to engage in no co-operation for any purpose with any other religious body. The Disciples of Christ, on the contrary, have welcomed every opportunity for such co-operation. It is true that the decisions in favor of co-operation have not been made without some internal tensions and some overt struggles which left scars and opened the way for another schism, but the collective action of the group through its agencies for action has uniformly been in the direction of practicing the broadest possible fellowship with all Christians and participating to the fullest possible extent in causes representing interests common to the whole church. This, then, was also a part of the heritage which twentieth-century Disciples received from their fathers, and it has become one of the characteristics of the denomination now known as "Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)."

## VI

### *Our Heritage from the Fathers*

THE "OUR" IN THIS TITLE refers specifically to Disciples of Christ in the twentieth century. It is true that most of the anticipated readers of this book began their mature lives considerably after the beginning of the century, but, since we ended the list of "our fathers" with those who did the major part of their work before that date, it seems consistent to regard all who came after those men of the past as living in a somewhat extended present. Even within this period great changes have occurred.

Between heritage, which is a gift from the past, and destiny, which is a hope for the future, lies the area of present resources and responsibilities. The effective heritage of a man or a movement is partly a complex of inescapable circumstances and partly a body of ideas and modes of behavior from which can be selected that which is serviceable for the purposes in view.

"No man is an island," John Donne wrote. "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." In these dramatic words he was speaking of the interdependence between every man and all his contemporaries. But our dependence extends even farther than that. Its dimensions are vertical through time as well as horizontal through space. Human history is a continuous fabric in which the warp runs on through the ages, and each generation weaves into it the woof which makes the pattern of its own time. But since this is a human fabric and the men and women who constitute its substance are responsible persons,

the warp itself may be changed in color and quality though its continuity cannot be broken, and the woof is the resultant of the aims and efforts of many individuals in each generation who are as free as individuals can be in such a web of interrelationship.

This analogy, though imperfect as all analogies are, suggests some aspects of the nature of a "heritage." Specific groups—such as races, nations, communities, organizations of all kinds, religious bodies, families—have their specific heritages as well as the more general ones in which they hold an undivided interest. Our immediate concern is with the heritage of the "Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)" in the twentieth century. In surveying our fathers' heritage we found that we must recognize a great variety of values which were the common property of the whole Christian world, as well as some that were held by some Christians but not by all, and some that were held by large non-Christian groups. Before taking inventory of our heritage from the fathers, we found need to observe what they did with theirs, how much of it they passed on to us, and what they added to it. It is quite possible also that we may want to incorporate into our thinking some features of that older heritage to which our fathers were indifferent or which they rejected outright, as well as to reject some things that they accepted and would have wanted to transmit to their successors. It cannot be made too clear that nothing is entailed upon us regardless of our own judgment. These things are resources available to us, not shackles upon our minds. Nevertheless the fact that we call these men *our* fathers, and that we call ourselves members of the religious movement which they initiated, rests upon the fact that, in reality, we do accept what we consider the essential and distinctive features of their program of thought and action.

The specific heritage of present-day Disciples includes the total stream of the movement's history. It is for this reason that we have become solicitous about preserving our records and literature, and that such elaborate provision has been made for the collection, preservation, and study of these materials in the Historical Society's Phillips Memorial building at Nashville. Merely keeping these important materials, or even using them as source materials for the writers of histories and Ph.D. theses, is not really utilizing our historic heritage. For that, we must evaluate what



we find in the record; cultivate, embody, and propagate those ideas in it which are alive; and decently bury with all due respect and grateful memory—or, as one of Shakespeare's sonnets puts it, "with many a holy and obsequious tear"—those parts of it that are dead, as some parts of it are. In doing this, we shall be doing only what our fathers did with some parts of their heritage. The only reason they could become the fathers of any movement was that they accepted so much of their heritage as they deemed to be of enduring value, rejected the rest, and added some new insights of their own.

We Disciples of Christ in the twentieth century, and especially in the seventh decade of that century, have inherited, as our fathers did, the sum total of the Christian tradition down to their time, plus the thinking and the achievements of the whole church, divided though it is, from their time to ours. From all this we can, as they did, select what our judgment approves as valid and valuable. In addition, we enjoy the heritage of our own movement, oriented as it is toward the unity of the church and, in some sense, toward the restoration of its primitive simplicity and loyalty. This movement is a going concern with the momentum as well as the accumulated resources of its past. Like runners in a relay race, we are off with a flying start. Like the heirs to a solvent business, we begin with the prestige, the good will, the experience and the funded capital of the concern. The movement has a great number of adherents, many trained workers, and a wide spread of its operations. Its history is an asset. Its fathers are themselves a part of their legacy to later generations, with the inspiring example of their fidelity, their courage, their unselfish devotion to a cause. The movement has no continuity of bishops, but it carries on the continuity of a specific Christian community.

This movement as it comes down to us is divided into two main streams between which there is little fellowship and no co-operation. There are many on both sides who look wistfully across the gulf that now separates them and would gladly extend the hand of brotherhood even if joining hands in co-operation is forbidden by the strict tenets of one party. This breach was made a matter of public statistical record in 1906, but it had been an actuality long before that. As far back as 1875 J. H.

Garrison, then not far from the beginning of his journalistic career, editorially deplored the alientation between those who supported the societies and those who did not. In the *Christian* for March 18 of that year he urged that the two parties should not disfellowship each other on the ground of this difference of opinion about missionary methods but, still regarding all as one undivided brotherhood, should strive to demonstrate the superiority of their respective methods by showing greater zeal and efficiency in missions.<sup>1</sup> But the antisociety people insisted societies were apostasy, and supporters of the societies came to regard nonsupport of them as schism. Thus both parties inherited a unity movement already marred by schism within its own ranks. The prosociety group became "our denomination" for most of those who will read these pages.

Another breach was in the making before the first one had been formally acknowledged to exist. It is hard to know how early it began to be evident that there were two types of mind even among those Disciples who agreed that missionary societies and organs were not necessarily offenses against the restoration principle. Up to the end of the nineteenth century there were too few "liberals" of any sort to permit the simple explanation that the incipient cleavage was between liberals and conservatives. And yet, that was a part of the difficulty; perhaps the root of it if the terms be taken as describing types of mind rather than bodies of doctrine. Not many Disciples at that period accepted the newer view of the Bible which, even in the Middle West, was beginning to win some away from the traditional view of the authorship and dates of the biblical books and to destroy the ancient delusion that belief in plenary inspiration and biblical infallibility was an essential article of the Christian faith. Even in the early nineties, however, there were coming to be many who were tolerant of those who did accept these newer views. Differences in attitude toward the Bible underlie almost all the points that are at issue between thoroughgoing conservatives and liberals of whatever degree of liberalism. Both of the two contrasting attitudes found expression in early Disciple litera-

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<sup>1</sup>For this reference I am indebted to Dr. William Tucker, who quotes it in his Yale Ph.D. thesis, "The Life and Work of James Harvey Garrison," which is in process of publication as this is written.

ture; both can be found in the writings of Alexander Campbell. His Lockian theory of knowledge recognized no means of communication from God to man except in words "used in their ordinary sense," and he referred to the writers of the books of the Bible as "inspired amanuenses," as though he visualized them as secretaries taking dictation from the Holy Ghost; but he anticipated some of the problems of biblical criticism by his clear distinctions between the Old Testament and the New, and by the "rules of interpretation" in which he declared that every passage of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of "who wrote it? to whom? when? and why?" It could also be pointed out that acceptance of the infallibility of the Bible could not be brought under the head of restoring apostolic Christianity because the New Testament did not then exist and the contents of the New Testament as we have it were not completely determined until two or three centuries later. Nevertheless it is undeniably true that the great majority of Disciples in the nineteenth century held firmly to the dogma of infallibility and regarded both the basic doctrines of evangelical Christianity and the specific teachings of what they called "our position" as resting solidly on that basis, and as being imperiled or destroyed if this foundation were not preserved intact and unquestioned. The infiltration of a different view of the Bible had already begun, however. It manifested itself in an increasing tolerance for it even by those who did not openly accept it, in a tendency away from the authoritarian type of preaching which buttressed every proposition by the citation of a proof text, and by a friendlier attitude toward other denominations.

This divergence between the two types of mind, with the consequent controversies over practices and policies, was registered in the contrasting attitudes of *The Christian-Evangelist* and the *Christian Standard*. The editor of the former was a conservative liberal, or a liberal conservative, who was moving slowly throughout his long life toward more liberal positions and who was never alarmed by the views of younger men who had moved faster and farther than he in that direction. The editors of the latter, after the great days of Isaac Errett's complete control of that paper, stood solidly upon the opinions of the earlier days, unimpressed by any discoveries of new truth or any advances in



religious thought within the previous half-century, and becoming constantly more vehement in resistance to such things. A new period of controversy began, which was embittered by nontheological factors which the present author cannot describe without inviting the charge of prejudice. This was not a mere quarrel between two papers nor rivalry between competing publishing houses, as many supposed for a time. As fresh occasions arose, it became increasingly evident that what was actually happening was that Disciples of Christ were dividing into two distinct groups.

The proposal of a general federation of churches, which reached the ears of Disciples at the convention in Omaha, 1902, presented an issue which led to sharp controversy that continued until, and to some extent after, the formation of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America in 1908, with Disciples as one of the charter member communions. In the intervening years the word "federation" was the shibboleth by which every preacher's alignment could be determined. The more liberal group had the advantage in this test of strength, for not only did most of the leaders favor federation but the great middle group of both ministers and laymen who could perhaps make no carefully reasoned decision about it were predisposed to look with favor on anything that bore any resemblance to unity or seemed to move in that direction. The vote favored the federation resolution at Omaha in 1902 by a large majority, and entrance into the Federal Council had been approved at Norfolk with only one negative vote, but the opposition was much stronger than these bare facts would indicate. The decision rangled in the minds of the strict constructionists.

Active hostilities were resumed when Professor H. L. Willett, a very eloquent preacher and an avowed exponent of critical biblical study who was then probably more in demand as a public lecturer in this field than any other man in America, was assigned a place on the program of the great Centennial Convention that was to be held in Pittsburgh in 1909. The attack was first on Willett and then upon the program-makers and especially on the leaders of the missionary societies who had put him on the program. The editors of the two papers mentioned above led, respectively, the attack and the defense, one demand-



ing that purity of Disciple doctrine be maintained, the other defending freedom of scholarship and utterance.

Open membership, or the admission of unimmersed members of other Christian communions to Disciple churches, was brought forward as the next divisive issue. Strangely enough, the issue here was not as to whether or not this practice *ought* to be adopted, but as to whether or not it had been in certain mission fields, especially China. Very few of the home churches practiced open membership, though a much larger number of ministers favored it on principle and were restrained from practicing it by the fear that it would make more trouble than it was worth. The real issue of open membership was never openly debated, because the opinions of the relatively few who favored it were never openly expressed on the platform of the conventions or in the columns of the papers. There was a strong feeling, however, that the charge of open membership in China was unproved, and that in any case the conditions on the mission field might justify some arrangement that was very much like it without committing the home churches to the approval of any change in the customary Disciple practice. The attack on the societies for countenancing any such thing was carried on at several conventions, beginning in the very early '20's, and between conventions. When the initial impulse to these hostilities was exhausted, other reasons were found for continuing them. After a series of tempestuous conventions, the break came at Memphis in 1926. After the "conservatives" had failed to capture the organization by holding a preconvention caucus, they withdrew, and peace thereafter reigned at the conventions. The following year saw the organization of the "North American Christian Convention." It was a peace by separation. The attacks on all the organized agencies of Disciples of Christ continued, but the contending parties were now too far apart to hear each other's voices or feel each other's blows, and one of them tended to ignore the other rather than to contend with it.

Almost all the colleges as they became academically excellent had become liberal in spirit. Naturally they maintained and strengthened their ties with the other organized agencies and with the churches that supported them. The graduate divinity schools (Butler, Drake, Phillips, College of the Bible, Brite) kept their

association with the organized life of Disciples, gradually raising their standards of scholarship and moving toward more modern modes of theological thought—which does not mean that they generally adopted what could be called a “liberal theology.” In contrast, the group that had now decisively withdrawn from the organized life of the communion established a great many “Bible seminaries” for the quick training of as many young men as possible to carry on a ministry based upon the traditional slogans and the unscrutinized presuppositions of early nineteenth-century religion and the principle of restoration in a rigid form. Fundamentalism became the rule of faith of this segment. Separate lists of ministers have been issued, listing only “loyal” men.<sup>2</sup>

The simple truth, then, is that Disciples of Christ of the twentieth century inherited from their forebears a communion which had already suffered one decisive schism and was showing clear signs of a plane of cleavage that was on the way toward becoming a second split within the first thirty years of the century. Dr. DeGroot has listed three criteria of unity in a denomination. These are: 1. The same conventions as assemblies for fellowship and for the transaction of business. 2. Co-operation through the same agencies. 3. Free movement of ministers among the churches of the communion. Disciples of Christ as represented in their *Yearbook* and reported in the official statistics do not meet any one of these three criteria. The group commonly known as the “nonco-operatives” do not attend the International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), do not co-operate through the agencies with those who are affiliated with it, and do not countenance or accept any ministers except those of their own kind. It could scarcely be maintained that the patronage of one general convention and one set of missionary, educational, and benevolent agencies could be criteria of the unity of the one world-wide united church when and if that goal is ever reached, and there would be some necessary limits to the free movement of ministers. These are, however, valid practical criteria of the unity of a denomination. The significant feature is the reason for the absence of these characteristics and the pres-

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<sup>2</sup>The details of these controversies and the ensuing division are presented more fully in *Fifty Years of Attack and Controversy*, by Stephen J. Corey, and *The Grounds of Division in the Restoration Principle*, by A. T. DeGroot.

ence or absence of the spirit of fraternal love and mutual concern among the parties. If the reason were that a communion has become so large, so extended geographically or racially, or so culturally or linguistically diversified that its members cannot be effectively represented in a single convention or co-operate through one set of agencies, though the sense of a universal Christian fellowship pervades the whole, then they would be still united. But when the reason is mutual hostility and suspicion, or even a one-way hostility and suspicion if that is possible, then there is a schism of the body as well as a diversity of organizations. Disciples of Christ should not complacently accept the mere fact of nonco-operation as in itself producing a decisive schism in their ranks, but should rather seek to overcome the alienation of which that nonco-operation is the sign. Meanwhile, however, they are in effect divided. Let us consider more critically, then, what are the institutions and ideas which now constitute the actual heritage of those who find their denominational fellowship in the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ).

It is no small thing for the current generation of those who perpetuate and promote a continuing enterprise to inherit some solidly established and actively functioning institutions. These things cannot be improvised overnight. They are plants of slow growth that must have time to send down deep roots before they can bear much fruit. Institutionalism may hamper the development and corrupt the spirit of a movement, but institutions are indispensable for efficiency. They are more than agencies through which the like-minded co-operate. They are also the means by which men project their purposes beyond the span of their own lives, and by which a continuity of intention from one generation to the next can become a continuity of effective effort for its realization. It is a matter of importance that twentieth-century Disciples inherited missionary, educational and, to some slight extent, benevolent institutions from those who had gone before.

The national missionary institutions at the beginning of the century were: the American Christian Missionary Society, devoting itself wholly to the work of home missions; the Foreign Christian Missionary Society, which, as stated earlier, had established in India, China, and Japan missions which by this time



had become substantial, and very recently (in 1897) had begun the work in the Congo which was to become one of the most dramatically successful enterprises in the whole history of Protestant missions<sup>3</sup>; the Christian Woman's Board of Missions, which had long done foreign work in Jamaica and more recently in Mexico, and also fostered special types of home missions, and had begun the organization of Bible chairs at state universities, a device which was virtually its own invention. With these should be mentioned the Board of Church Extension, the Board of Ministerial Relief (out of which grew the Pension Fund), and the new and still feeble National Benevolent Association. Support of all these agencies was pitifully small, chiefly because the system for enlisting the effective interest of the churches and their members was wholly inadequate. To each cause was assigned a special "day," on which the minister was urged to preach on the subject and subscriptions were taken. The ordinary member who subscribed five or ten dollars for foreign missions on the first Sunday in March thought he was being really generous, and so he was in comparison with the average. He would probably skip the next offering, which would be for home missions on the first Sunday in May, because he had already given so lavishly for foreign missions. If the plan of incorporating offerings for general enterprises into the budget of the local church for regular giving had ever been suggested, few had heard of it and fewer still practiced it. Here is a point at which Disciples in the last two generations have improved upon their heritage.

The state missionary societies, some of which had done little more than exist during their early years, had already begun to deal more efficiently with the work for which they had assumed responsibility. In the modern period the scope of their interest has been broadened beyond a bare concern for winning new members and establishing new churches and, while not neglecting these vital matters, has come to include such matters as Christian education, the development of a variety of youth programs, in some cases the establishment of homes for children and for the aged, and the offering of expert counsel to local

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<sup>3</sup>By the statistics for 1959, Disciples have more baptized members in the churches of the Congo mission than in all their other churches throughout the world outside of the United States, and twice as many as in Great Britain and all the British Commonwealth countries.



churches that are confronting special problems. Since the state societies derive their authority from the state conventions, the increased range and volume of their activities has made it seem wise in some states to give the conventions a more substantial and responsible organization as bodies of delegates from the churches rather than mass meetings at which everyone who attends and registers is a voting member.

The present generation (using the term comprehensively as indicated in the opening paragraph of this chapter) inherited from its predecessors a sense of responsibility for Christian activity in evangelism, missions at home and abroad, education, benevolence and social welfare, a full set of societies that had been organized for the promotion of these interests, and a system of mass-meeting conventions to which the societies reported and from which they received authority to carry on their work. Since a history of the changes in convention structure is not within the compass of this book, it is unnecessary to do more than mention two important facts: first, that for a good many years each annual national convention was a group of conventions of the several societies with voting power technically (but not actually) restricted to those who had become members of the societies by making a certain minimum direct contribution to its funds; second, that between 1907 and 1914 a strong effort was made to reorganize the convention on a delegate basis so that its voting members would be only persons who had been chosen to represent their respective congregations. This plan was successfully incorporated into a new constitution, but completely failed in practice, partly at least, as in the first convention in 1849, because the churches did not send delegates and throngs of good Disciples attended as usual without credentials.

The most important step in improving the operation of the many inherited societies was to reduce their number by consolidation. A merger of six societies, or boards, in 1920 produced The United Christian Missionary Society.<sup>4</sup> After a few years the National Benevolent Association, the Board of Ministerial Relief (Pension Fund) and the Board of Church Extension resumed their separate status, and still later the Board of Temper-

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<sup>4</sup>For particulars as to the structure of the United Society, see the brochure, *Forty Years of Service, 1920-1960*, published by the society in 1960.

ance and Social Welfare became a department of the United Society.

In all these changes the urge was toward a degree of unity which would permit an over-all strategy covering as much of the total field as could advantageously be so co-ordinated, prevent wasteful competition and duplication without producing a monolithic structure, and make more effective the appeal to the churches to give moral and financial support to all phases of the work.

In education, as in missions, it has been found advantageous to bring the churches into a closer relation with the institutional agencies through which the work has to be done, though the details of the process are necessarily quite different. It was earlier remarked that in the nineteenth century the colleges did much for the churches but the churches did little for the colleges.

In 1900 there were over forty colleges, universities and other schools under Disciple auspices, with total assets of \$3,300,000, less than half of which was endowment funds. The fortunes of the colleges were at very low ebb. Most of them were struggling for life. At the end of its first sixty years, Bethany's total assets, aside from campus and buildings, were \$5,000 in investments, \$25,000 in interest-bearing notes, \$30,000 in noninterest-bearing pledges, and a conditional offer of \$10,000 more.<sup>5</sup>

In more recent years the tie between the colleges and the churches has become much closer. The colleges have, in general, continued to recognize a special duty to serve the churches and the denomination with which they have been historically associated. The churches have increasingly realized that they can be better served if they will actively support the colleges but leave them free to manage their own internal affairs. Both the colleges and the churches have benefited by this policy.

As the colleges have matured and improved in their academic quality, a change has come in the relation between the colleges and the churches. The colleges are, in general, no longer so

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<sup>5</sup>*The Disciples of Christ: A History*, by W. E. Garrison and A. T. DeGroot, p. 413. Since Bethany's financial condition in 1900 has been cited as an illustration of the sad state of Disciple colleges at that time, it may be added that as of December, 1960, Bethany's endowment was \$7,500,000, and the replacement value of its physical plant over \$14,000,000. Thus the present assets of this one college are almost seven times the total for all forty of the institutions at the earlier date. Some of the forty have made comparable gains while others died of starvation, but the net result has been a vast improvement in financial solvency and academic quality.

completely "ours" in the sense of being agencies for the promotion of the doctrines and purposes of Disciples of Christ. They are still Christian colleges, but they are to only a limited degree denominational colleges. This is especially true of the larger ones and of those located in cities from which they draw a large per cent of their students. It is entirely true of the few that have become universities in fact as well as in name. A denominational university is a contradiction in terms. None, or almost none, of these educational institutions is staffed entirely by professors who are Disciples of Christ, or controlled by a board of trustees all of whom are Disciples, or gets financial support from none but Disciples. Disciples can still say that they are "ours," but more as being our contribution to Christian higher education than as agencies for the promotion of our specific cause.

Yet the relation of the colleges to the churches has in some respects grown more intimate in these later years than it ever was before, and their contribution to the morale and efficiency of the denomination has become greater. Beginning in 1894 there were several efforts, only slightly successful, to forge some sort of link among the colleges and between them and the organized life of the denomination as represented in its conventions and societies. First there was a Board of Education of seven or nine members, subsidiary to the American Christian Missionary Society; then an American Christian Education Society, authorized by the national convention and designed to be co-ordinate with the national missionary societies;<sup>6</sup> then an Association of Colleges of Disciples of Christ, which was virtually an independent association of the college presidents for consultation; then (1914) the Board of Education of Disciples of Christ, which was the first organization in this series to produce any appreciable results. After various alterations of structure this last (in 1938) became, or was succeeded by, a Board of Higher Education consisting of the heads of the thirty-four colleges, universities, seminaries, and student foundations

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<sup>6</sup>This society got some publicity for the neglected cause of education by establishing an Education Day, the third Sunday in January (this was at the time when every cause had to have its "day"), and by speeches at conventions and articles in the papers, but its net accomplishment was nearly nil. The author of this volume can speak freely of the futility of this society for he was its president throughout the period of its quasi activity, beginning in 1903, and after two or three years it died on his hands. Its weakness was that it tried to do something *for* the colleges instead of *with* them.



which are affiliated with it and report to the International Convention, plus enough additional members elected by the convention to bring the total number to eighty. The board so constituted represents the sense of common interest and mutual responsibility between the educational institutions and the churches, and it does so without encroaching upon the rights and liberties of either party. Each college still bears, as it must, the responsibility for its own academic and financial administration and for its own promotional work, while their collaboration in and through the board makes them partners in the total educational enterprise. The concern of the churches has been further expressed, in recent years, by increasingly generous financial aid by annual gifts to the colleges in their respective areas through the regular budgets of local congregations. To summarize, it may be said that the heritage of institutions, both missionary and educational, that came from the nineteenth century to the twentieth has been gratefully accepted, zealously utilized, and intelligently developed and improved. There have been radical changes in missionary methods, in the organization and interrelationship of boards, and in the quality, resources, and equipment and to some extent in the educational objectives of the colleges. These have been changes for the better. One result of them has been to increase the denominational solidarity of Disciples of Christ and thus to increase their efficiency. I am willing to go on record as saying that Disciples of this generation have been good stewards of their institutional heritage from the fathers. Whether or not this increase in what I am calling "denominational solidarity" has been at the expense of sacrificing the cause of unity will have to be considered in a later chapter.

The most important heritage is not a set of institutions but a body of ideas. This is true of Disciples of Christ whether we are considering all the streams that have flowed from the initiative of our fathers (that is, the "four million") or only the co-operative members of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) who constitute what I am calling the denomination (the one million, more or less). What has happened to those ideas? It is fairly easy to answer that question for the Churches of Christ, because there is a high degree of agreement among them on



the main ideas, though enough diversity on some details to produce a few divisions in their ranks. There are such splinter parties as the "one-cuppers" and the group that considers any meeting of less than the whole church (e.g., a Sunday church school class) to be culpably unscriptural. One observer claimed to have found six kinds of Churches of Christ in Texas alone. All, however, have clung to certain ideas which they did indeed inherit from the fathers. Among these are a completely fundamentalist view of the Bible, a conviction that the New Testament contains the complete constitution of the church covering its polity, doctrine, and worship, and that this is an authoritative pattern for the church forever. The polity is the absolute autonomy of every congregation and the exclusion of any more comprehensive organization for any purpose whatever. The doctrine is substantially that set forth in such a book as Milligan's *The Scheme of Redemption*. The worship includes only those elements which are mentioned as elements of public worship in the earliest churches, specifically excluding instrumental music. All this is the "restoration of primitive Christianity." They are right in saying that every one of these items is found in the teachings of some of the fathers and constitutes an item in their heritage to us, though they do overlook the fact that ideas contrary to some of these are also parts of that same heritage, so that we are, in fact, compelled to be selective in our acceptance of the heritage whether or not we want to be. These are the things they have accepted. They lay little emphasis upon the quest of unity, upon which the fathers laid so much.

It is not too difficult to say how the heritage of ideas has been treated by those who are not members of the Churches of Christ but who also do not co-operate with any of the organized agencies of the Christian Churches—in short, those who are represented by the *Christian Standard* and the *Restoration Herald*. The framework of their thinking is not essentially different from that of the Churches of Christ. They are rigidly fundamentalist in their view of the nature of the Bible and in doctrine, and they stress the restoration principle, but they do not interpret the latter as forbidding the use of the organ or doing missionary work through societies. Their refusal to co-operate with the agencies of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) is explained by

their regarding these agencies as, from their fundamentalist point of view, dangerously "liberal," or as not sufficiently insistent upon immersion especially on the mission fields.

It is not so easy, but more important, to consider how the heritage of ideas is faring among the members of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), who co-operate with the agencies and constitute what we are calling the organized denomination. It is not so easy because this group has a high degree of tolerance for varieties of opinion within itself, including tolerance for those who, like the present writer, do not think that loyalty to the fathers and to the movement they initiated requires adherence to all their ideas or all the customs and practices that have been cherished during the movement's development. It is important for us to have some understanding on this point because this is the group to which the writer and most of the potential readers of this book belong.

If we were to review the list of the items which our fathers accepted as a heritage from their fathers and those which they added, and were to annotate this list by indicating for each item whether or not Disciples of Christ now accept it, the entry in several cases would have to be, "Some do and some do not." Disciples of today accept from the total stream of the Christian tradition the great Christian realities which the fathers accepted; but, just as our fathers accepted some of these with amendment of their conventional definitions and inferences, so the mature thought and scholarship of later generations has required further revisions that have won varying degrees of acceptance. There is no question about the necessity of a concept of God as Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos, a God of wisdom, love, and justice, a God in whom it is reasonable for men to believe and to whom it is reasonable for them to pray; but some have put aside the earlier objection to the classic trinitarian formulation, and some, moving in the other direction, have modified their view under the influence of later trends in religious and philosophical thought. The gospel of man's salvation through Christ is preached by every preacher, but salvation is often, perhaps generally, defined in less eschatological terms, and the honored formula of "faith, repentance, and baptism," valid as all these elements are, is not generally regarded as the "uniform, authori-

tative method of presenting the gospel." But those who think it is and those who think it is not stand together in the same fellowship of faith. In regard to the Bible, which all value and revere, there is the widest possible diversity of views and variation in modes of understanding and use. The heritage from our early fathers and from almost all before the end of the nineteenth century was a clear-cut fundamentalist view of the Bible as being in every part the completely inspired Word of God, infallible in every sentence which, by its grammatical structure, professes to state a fact or a truth. Many still hold this view. Many who do not themselves hold it continue to talk as though they did, or talk ambiguously, for fear of "shaking the faith" of others, taking no account of the fact that faith sometimes needs to be shaken up even at the risk of shaking it down. Many others have fully taken into account the results of modern scholarship and do not conceal the change that it has wrought in their thinking. It would be impossible for anyone to write a clear and unambiguous statement of any one view of the nature of biblical inspiration and authority and say of it, "This is what Disciples of Christ believe about the Bible." The truth about it would be, "Some do and some don't."

Our fathers had accepted the church as part of their heritage, but they rejected the concepts of its nature and structure which had been held (and are still held) by the vast majority of Christians during all the centuries from the second to the twentieth. They asserted that the New Testament presents an unmistakable and authoritative diagram for the organization and worship of the church, and that this demands a democratic structure without any privileged class of clergy or prelates, and with the absolute autonomy of every local congregation and a simple non-liturgical type of public worship. There has never been any subsequent question about the importance of the church, but there has been much question about the whole concept of "restoration" as applied to all the details which the fathers planned to restore. Here again, "some do and some don't" regard it as helpful to emphasize the ideal of restoring primitive Christianity, but none will go so far as to regard organs and missionary societies as forbidden because the churches in the first century did not have them.



In recent years there has been a rising tide of opinion that the autonomy and complete independence of the local congregation has been overemphasized, that there is no authoritative New Testament model which demands it. It is felt by many that this extreme congregationalism leaves unrecognized both the spiritual and the functional unity of the church, and that both local and general interests would benefit from the development of a system which, while preserving the necessary degree of local control, would integrate the total resources of the churches in such a way as to be more effective in doing the whole work that they want done. Great strides have been made in eliminating the weaknesses of excessive localism by co-operation through the agencies and by the multiplied services that these agencies are now rendering. While some are still zealous for local autonomy and alert to resent any seeming or threatened encroachment on it by overhead organizations, it seems evident that the heritage of absolute congregational independency, though accepted tentatively, has undergone substantial modifications in practice if not in theory.

Disciples of Christ today hold to the Protestant principles of justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers as strongly as did those of the nineteenth century. While denying nothing that was involved in these principles, they have supplemented them and have enriched their meanings. Faith alone, the classic *sola fide*, is still a valid theological maxim in the sense of rejecting the theory of salvation by meritorious ritualistic acts or merely moral conduct, but this idea can scarcely be presented now without some emphasis upon the practical outcome of a significant faith in virtuous living and the acceptance of some social responsibility for the welfare of mankind. Our ministers are no more priests than they were a century ago, but there is a ministry more responsible, better trained for their work, and therefore in actual practice more clearly distinguished from the laity than in the earlier Disciple tradition. In all honesty it must be admitted that the action of the railroads in granting half-fare to the clergy had something to do with drawing a clearer line between those who were "clergy" and those who were not.

In the field of theology and Christian doctrine, the general Christian heritage has been accepted, with such modifications



and restrictions as have been indicated above, but the disposition to make the theology of the nineteenth-century fathers normative for present-day Disciples has been limited, for the most part, to those who deny the legitimacy of theology and do not admit that they have any. Alexander Campbell wrote into the charter of Bethany College the restriction that it should never teach theology. His own theology, as set forth for example in his *Christian System*, never became an official theology for Disciples of Christ, though it became the actual theology of most of them in the early and middle periods of their development. Any Disciple now is at liberty to agree with every item of it but probably most of them do not. The traditional aversion to theology, at least under that name, has for the most part been put aside. There is one graduate school for the education of ministers that boldly calls itself a "theological seminary," and there is probably none that does not give courses in theology, or at least feel that it could do so without losing face. Theological freedom, rather than a boasted freedom from theology, has become characteristic of Disciples of Christ.

This freedom was a part of Disciple tradition from the beginning, at least in theory, but the actual diversities were relatively few and slight. There are some famous episodes. Thomas Campbell defended the right of Aylett Raines to continue to be a Disciple minister though he had espoused the doctrine of universal salvation. Dr. L. L. Pinkerton was a rather advanced liberal (and almost the only one) in the 1860's. Moses E. Lard's denial that the punishment of sinners is endless, because the Greek *aionios* does not mean endless, brought muttered threats that he should be disfellowshipped, but these threats were drowned in a chorus of protests—chiefly from men who believed that the punishment of sinners *is* eternal but that Lard had a right to hold the opposite opinion. The old slogan, "In opinions, liberty," had served Disciples well, but as a matter of fact not many in the earlier days had made much use of that liberty. For the most part they stayed in the groove of religious thought that had been established by the earliest leaders of the movement. The present century brought new influences. The cultural isolation which had unquestionably kept from most Disciples any fruitful knowledge of what was going on in the

intellectual world first faded, then ended. For better or worse, their leaders of thought became aware of evolution and biblical criticism, of the pragmatism of James and Dewey, of liberalism in its modern forms and of the "social gospel." Bergson and Whitehead made their impact, as did Barth and Brunner and neo-orthodoxy, and Kierkegaard and existentialism. It was a far cry from the day when John Locke was Campbell's "*the Christian philosopher*" with only such reinforcement as could be furnished by Thomas Reid of Glasgow. The men into whose minds filtered the influence of these various types of thought (even in many cases at two or three stages of removal from their origins) developed varying theologies.

That boasted "liberty in opinion" was now really put to the test—now that there were some significant differences of opinion. And it stood the test. At least it stood the test among the group that we are now considering. The nonco-operatives, who were already on the way to separation, went their own way and developed their own methods of dealing with theological deviations from their fundamentalist standards of orthodoxy. The Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) learned to live happily together, not without interesting theological disputations but with a minimum of theological animosity, giving to the Christian world a notable demonstration of the truth that Christians who are loyal to Christ do not need to be united by theological agreement in order to be *united*. If anyone wants to know "where we stand," that is where we stand. Does the denomination accept the theological heritage transmitted from the fathers? Some of its members do, more do not. Does it accept their heritage of theological freedom? It does.

Some of the modifications which our fathers made in their heritage from their fathers were so significant that they became important additions to it. Indeed, I will risk saying that all the additions they made can best be considered as modifications of what they had received. It is a commonplace (but true) that their program was organized around the two foci: unity and restoration. Both of these were old ideas, but they had something new to say about them. As to unity, further consideration will be given to that in the following chapter. As to restoration, there will be some closing comments on that in the final chapter.

## VII

### *The Ecumenical Effort*

THE ONE OUTSTANDING and indisputable feature of the heritage which the founding fathers of Disciples of Christ transmitted to them, and which Disciples have accepted with enthusiasm, is the urge to promote universal fellowship among the followers of Christ and the attainment of a united church. In following the development of this idea and the course of thought and action which grew out of it, there must of necessity be some repetition of what has been said in considering what the fathers received and accepted from those who had gone before them and what they added to it, for they both received and revived the idea that the church ought to be united and they did add something to it.

Two motives stirred those adventurous pioneers in the early nineteenth century. One was a revulsion against the odious features of sectarianism as they saw it in actual operation, breeding bitterness and alienation where there should have been brotherly love and weakening the appeal of the Christian message to those who needed it most. The other was the conviction, drawn from their study of the New Testament, that the church, which was undivided in the days of the apostles, was by its very nature essentially one body, any schism in which was to that extent a destruction of an indispensable element in the very being of the church and was therefore contrary to the will of God. That the church should be one church was, as has



been repeatedly said, an old idea, but it had fallen into oblivion in Scotland and Presbyterian North Ireland, where Thomas Campbell had his early experience, and in America, where the denominations were exulting in their new-found freedom to exist and were prepared to maintain that division was a necessary and admirable corollary of the American principle of religious liberty. In such a situation, our fathers had the insight to perceive that the church still ought to be united and the courage to initiate a program for uniting it.

It would have been unreasonable to expect that, in their first flash of enthusiasm for unity even though this were accompanied by a deep and permanent commitment to the objective, they would improvise a complete and consistent program for its realization. In fact, they did not. Even in their earliest pronouncements, their proposals were either vague or ambiguous. The Springfield Presbytery wanted only to "sink into unity with the Body of Christ at large" by putting away the Presbyterian name and the confession of faith, urging the people to "take the Bible as their only sure guide to heaven," making every congregation independent of every other, and providing that preachers should be paid by free-will offerings "without a written call or subscription."

Thomas and Alexander Campbell, when they were stirred to action by the sight of the "horrid evil of sectarianism," were at once concerned with what the scriptures tell us about the church, and they wisely decided that the place to look for this was in the New Testament. From this point their thinking followed two diverging courses. On the one hand it seemed that the union of Christians could be sought on the basis of those few things which, being distinctive of Christians and common to all Christians, must be the things that made them Christians and therefore qualified them for membership in a united church. Thomas Campbell in the "Address" rejoiced that "all the Churches of Christ . . . are not only agreed in the great doctrines of faith and holiness, but are also materially agreed as to the positive ordinances of Gospel institution; so that our differences, at most, are about the things in which the kingdom of God does not consist"—thus virtually declaring that the churches just as they are could unite if they would cease to re-



gard their differences on many irrelevant things as barriers to union. This was a proposal for union on the basis of the faith held in common by all Christians, still allowing liberty for varieties of doctrine and practice within the one united body.

However, in the same group of documents—the *Declaration and Address*, and the *Appendix*—Thomas Campbell began to call for the formulation of a complete system of doctrine, polity, and worship, all drawn directly from the New Testament, to determine the program of the Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania) and presumably to be the basis for the union of all Christians in one church. This was something very different from the other proposal, and it was this latter which was destined to determine for many years the development of the movement which grew out of this initiative. This was the restoration formula. It was no longer deemed sufficient to restore the earliest criterion of fitness for admission to Christian fellowship, the acknowledgment that “Jesus is Lord.” The theological creeds were indeed brushed aside as mere “human opinion,” but Alexander Campbell’s “particular ecclesiastical order” and Scott’s “uniform authoritative method of presenting the Gospel” (which was the “Gospel restored”) became in practice the basis upon which it was thereafter urged that the church should be united.

These things were an excellent basis upon which to build a new denomination, the members of which would be as sure they were right as the members of other denominations were that *they* were right; and since this program could be effectively defended by arguments from scripture and made a popular appeal, the denomination had a gratifying growth. The promoters of this program had not wanted a denomination, but that is what they got. As the basis for a united church, however, it had one fatal defect. It contained too many items which were disputable (and vehemently disputed) matters of opinion, however stoutly their protagonists might insist that they were the clear and indisputable teachings of the New Testament. The leaders of this movement and their followers did not have the superior New Testament scholarship that would enable them to determine better than others what was that “whole form of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government” revealed in the

New Testament, or even whether there was any such uniform and authoritative pattern. It was pure dogmatism to say that the proposed scheme was identical with an apostolic original. When the fathers permitted their restoration slogan to lead them in this direction, they turned aside from any possible road that could lead to a united church, suffered their unity ideal to go into eclipse, and were back with Glas, Sandeman, the Haldanes, and the other consecrated and courageous but sectarian restorationists of the eighteenth century—except that they did continue to *talk* about unity as a desirable objective.

To understand the spirit and also the predicament of Disciples of Christ throughout most of their history, and to some extent even yet, one must realize both the intensity of their conviction that sectarianism is a sin as well as a misfortune for the church, and the strength of their historic commitment to a plan of “restoring primitive Christianity” which, in practice, could not fail to produce a result that was the antithesis of their ecumenical intent.

The history of Christianity from its beginnings to the eighteenth century shows an almost continuous preoccupation with the problem of unity. There are two kinds of bases for unity, and two kinds of unity corresponding to them. One of these was tried for only a short time; the other was tried for centuries and always failed. The first of these types of unity was based on simple loyalty to Jesus Christ as Savior, had no creed except “Jesus is Lord,” possessed no organizational solidarity or doctrinal homogeneity, and found its cement in the unifying power of mutual love and the sense of a common cause. The actual co-operation among the primitive Christian communities was rudimentary and of course voluntary. Their essential unity did not depend upon it, but it was capable of growth as new needs for common action were discovered. The second type of unity was one of institutional organization and doctrinal homogeneity. It early began to develop a graded hierarchy of ecclesiastical authorities to form a visible consolidated structure for the church and a more elaborate theological system to be a bond among those who accepted it and a standard by which to judge and exclude those who did not.

One or the other of these two concepts determined the policies

of the church in its efforts to maintain its unity through the centuries. The first one did not continue in practice much beyond the apostolic age. From that time, the efforts to keep the church united followed, in chronological order though with some overlapping, one or the other of these patterns:<sup>1</sup>

1. Unity by exclusion. If a group of Christians can adopt a specific program of doctrine and practice and can declare that those who do not conform are not Christians at all, and are therefore no part of the church, then, from their point of view, the church is united, because it consists exclusively of those who *are* united. This solves the problem of unity at one stroke. It is a solution, of course, only for those who so declare that they are the church, the true church, and the whole church. The administrators of the church in the second and third centuries used this system so far as the still incomplete integration of church organization permitted. As deviant doctrinal views arose, the group that considered itself orthodox dubbed the others "heretics," called itself the "Catholic" church (meaning both orthodox and universal), and declared that the heretics were no part of it. The church might be diminished by the defection of dissenters, but it could not be divided, because it consisted only of those who were united. I call this "unity of exclusion." It might also be called "unity by definition." That is the official position of the Roman Catholic Church today. The church is not divided and cannot be, for it consists only of those who are in submission to the Bishop of Rome. Those who submit are united by that submission; those who do not are no part of the church.

2. Unity by compulsion. After the alliance of the church with the Roman Empire, and then with the feudal and national governments that arose upon the Empire's ruins, the Catholic Church had the power to enforce conformity with its doctrinal and administrative requirements by suppressing or liquidating any who might dissent. The police power of the state, together with the spiritual terrors that the church could invoke by its monopoly of the means of grace and its alleged possession of the keys to heaven and hell, became the instrument by which

<sup>1</sup>For a more detailed treatment see *The Quest and Character of a United Church*, by W. E. Garrison (Abingdon Press, 1957).



an almost complete unity was attained—subject to the rather large qualification that the churches east of the Adriatic never submitted to Rome's kind of unification. There were sporadic heresies and would-be reformers throughout the Middle Ages, but the sword, the stake, the gallows, and the rack took care of most of them. The inquisition and the crusade against the Albigensians indicate the importance the church attached to unity and the price it was willing to pay for it. This was unity by liquidation of the disunited. So, in spite of marginal but not unimportant pockets of resistance, there was a substantially united church in Western Europe from the end of the fourth century to the beginning of the sixteenth.

The Protestant Reformation changed the picture but did not immediately introduce any radically new principle. The decentralization of political power and the rise of nationalism produced independent areas in which reforms could start and flourish if the leaders could get the support of the rulers of these jurisdictions, as they did in several important areas. The result was the rise of Protestant state churches, each fighting to preserve its own unity and its dominance to the exclusion of all dissenters within its own area, and to this end using the same kind of tactics that the Roman church had already been using for a thousand years to keep all Europe under its sway. The intolerance of the Protestant state churches through the first two centuries of their existence is not a pretty story. A recent German Lutheran historian says that the Lutherans in Germany were never intolerant toward Catholics, and in proof cites the fact that a Catholic in Lutheran Saxony, though not allowed to remain in Saxony, could move to Catholic Bavaria—and so the Lutheran church in Saxony remained united and its membership was coextensive with the population, which was the end desired. This was unity by banishment of the disunited. All these efforts at unity by one form or another of compulsion failed in the long run, after a staggering cost in blood and agony. The consciences of men, both Christian and secular, revolted at the payment of such a price. Some began to doubt whether a unity of homogeneity was worth having at any price. Liberty seemed so much better. Its first appearance was in the Netherlands, which became for a time a haven for the persecuted.



3. Friendly overtures among the state churches. There was a unitive strain in the thinking of the leaders of the great Protestant state churches. These did not represent splits in an originally united Protestantism. They developed from independent, though related, revolts from Rome which were never able to come together. There were efforts in that direction. Melancthon, Calvin, and Cranmer took part in such efforts. It was assumed that each state church would continue to be the church in its own state, but the hope was that they might come to enough doctrinal and administrative agreement to permit fellowship and interchange across the frontiers. The actual cross-fertilization of minds (for example, between England and Geneva) had some significant results, but the predominant interest of each state church in its own separateness and status soon eclipsed any idea of one church, or even of a united Protestantism. In any statement going beyond a bare mention of this phase of union effort, it would be necessary to speak of some great irenic characters in the seventeenth century who tried to heal the wounds of ecclesiastical strife. There were men, not well enough remembered or sufficiently honored, such as Stillingfleet, Richard Baxter, John Bergius, Calibate Downing; and there were books with such titles as *The True and Only Way of Concord*, and *Considerations toward a Peaceable Reformation*, and more than one book entitled simply, *Irenicum* (meaning a plea for peace). Hugo Grotius, called "the father of international law," wrote a book entitled *The Way of Ecclesiastical Peace*. I think with special admiration of John Durie—Scottish by birth, Dutch by education, and cosmopolitan by habit—who spent the whole of a long lifetime weaving back and forth among the courts and church dignitaries of Europe, trying to promote harmony and fellowship among them; and of George Calixtus, the irenic Lutheran in an age of strife, who sought by conference and conciliation to make up the chronic quarrel between Lutherans and Calvinists over prickly points in theology. The results of all these well-meant efforts were slight and impermanent. At best they could have produced no more than a council of state churches, and they made no appreciable advance toward even that limited goal.

4. Unity on "essentials." The terms used to describe this seventeenth-century movement, chiefly in Germany, sound to

Disciple ears as though it may have hit upon an open road to unity. We are all familiar with the phrase: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." It was carried for many years at the masthead of *The Christian-Evangelist*, as an aphoristic statement of what Disciples stand for. The phrase came out of a strain of German thought. It did not then have quite the meaning later put into it. It described rather the attempt to get agreement between Lutheran and Calvinistic churches on the basis of a compromise creed less detailed, and perhaps more ambiguous, than the existing creeds of those churches, but still a pretty substantial body of doctrine. It was a generous phrase, but the catch was that it left the "essentials" quite undefined. The mood was generous, but the program was nothing more than a proposal that the theologians should get together and see if they could not agree to put some of their conflicting dogmas in the category of disputable opinions and make peace on the basis of the rather substantial body of theology which they held in common.

More specific were the words of John Locke, another seventeenth-century philosopher, not a churchman, who wrote:

Since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here, by the way, if it be not more agreeable to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of her communion consist in such things, and such things only, as the Holy Spirit has in the Holy Scriptures declared, in express words, to be necessary to salvation.

It is obvious that Locke's concern here was for unity, especially between the Church of England and the dissenting bodies. He would reduce all the diverse creeds and the rival systems of church organization and government to the status of incidentals, differences of opinion about which should be no obstacle to the unity of the church. In his "Third Letter on Toleration" he wrote:

Who, I beseech you, is it that makes sects? Is it not those who contract the Church of Christ within limits of their own contrivance?—who by articles and ceremonies of their own forming separate from their communion all that have not persuasions which jump with their model?

And in his "Reasonableness of Christianity," stressing again the need to bring Christianity back to the original simplicity of its terms of fellowship, he wrote:

What was sufficient to make a man a Christian in our Savior's time is sufficient still—the taking Him for our Lord and King, ordained so by God. . . . No man has a right to prescribe to me my faith, or magisterially to impose his opinions or interpretations on me. . . . It is this which I think makes me of no sect.

Perhaps this philosopher spoke a wiser word on the subject than any churchman of his time, but his proposal aroused no response and died into silence with scarcely an echo.

It is evident from this hasty historical sketch that there had been a continuing concern for unity. Of the four methods that had been used, the first three had failed and the fourth had never been seriously tried. After the great disruption in the sixteenth century, and especially after the denominational system became the Protestant pattern in the United States (and an approximation to it in other countries), church leaders were preoccupied with the problem of maintaining the solidarity of their respective denominations. They still acted on the presupposition—which had prevailed through the whole course of this history—that no unity or fellowship was possible, whether in a united church or in a denomination, except among those who conformed to a somewhat elaborate standard of doctrine and polity.

All the efforts toward any other unity than the solidarity of separate sects were ancient history by the time of Stone and the Campbells. Compulsion was no longer politically possible (except in Catholic countries). Liberty had arrived. There was freedom to divide. The Church of England regretted the loss of the dissenters but no longer tried to enforce conformity "or else harry them out of the country." The dissenters gloried in their new liberty, and still more did the denominations in America. Nobody thought about unity. Our fathers revived the ideal of unity in this new setting. For the first time in fifteen hundred years, a comprehensive union of Christians was proposed which was not to be required by the law of the state or enforced by the police and the courts, and an effort was made to put the

proposal into effect. It was to be a unity of Christians who were perfectly free to divide if they wanted to. *That was something new.* It was an audacious proposal.

In the moments of their clearest insight the fathers saw that union would be possible, if at all, only on the basis of "simple evangelical Christianity." This meant that Christians can, if they will, unite on the basis of whatever it is that makes them Christians. This was not theological compromise, or syncretism. It was setting theology in its proper place as irrelevant to unity. This did not mean that theology had no value, though the next generation or two of Disciples thought it meant that and consequently developed some very crude theology because they would not admit that they had any and so would not study it intelligently. Christians have some other duties besides union; one of those duties is to arrive at as full an understanding of their faith as possible. That is what theology is for. It is a hindrance only when accompanied by the idea that the holders of every different understanding of the faith must herd together in a separate communion which bases its unity on the ground that its members all have the same theology. The irrelevance of theology to the union of Christians was the great discovery. (The Faith and Order Commission has not discovered it yet, and some Disciples seem to have forgotten it.)

The very heart of our distinctive heritage from our fathers is the proposal that the church be united *not* on the basis of any "large measure of agreement in doctrine" (to quote the words of Dr. Visser 't Hooft) but on the basis of whatever it is that makes people Christians. This is the valid core of the restoration idea. To restore this basis of unity, which was the only one the earliest churches had, would open the way for the kind of unity they had and would still leave open the possibility of developing all kinds of co-operative activities among the like-minded which would promote the efficiency of the Christian movement while excluding no Christian and no group of Christians from the one church on the ground of variant ideas about other matters or nonparticipation in some particular set of activities.

This idea would not immediately have solved all problems, for there could still be differences of opinion as to what it is



that makes men Christians and how widely that term could be applied. Even the denominations which were inclined to be rather friendly to one another during the early part of the nineteenth century generally regarded one another as Christians, in an erroneous kind of way. Alexander Campbell answered that question for himself and most of his followers when, in his famous Lunenburg letter (1837), he declared that the unimmersed could be Christians. Presbyterians regarded Methodists as Christians and vice versa, and so with the other denominations. The proposal to unite all Christians in the one church could therefore start with a general agreement that the persons whom it was proposed to unite actually were Christians. This idea in the minds of early Disciples of Christ ran parallel with the contrasting idea that union required also agreement on a number of other things. The former was never obliterated by the latter, though for a long time it was almost submerged by it. This saved the Campbells and their colleagues from being wholly like the "little reformers" of the eighteenth century and gave their movement a drive and a growth that the others never had.

The Christian Association of Washington (Pennsylvania), which had put forth its impassioned plea for unity and its divisive proposal for the exact restoration of a specific pattern believed to be primitive, became the Brush Run Church, which presently became a member of the Redstone Baptist Association. During his seventeen years with the Baptists, Mr. Campbell was developing his "particular ecclesiastical order"—that is, a detailed scheme (biblically authorized, of course) of things that churches should do and not do. This began to be put into practice when the churches influenced by his thought had separated from the Baptists. This separation took place largely under the pressure of Scott in Ohio and Raccoon John Smith in Kentucky. So there came to be an increasing number of churches of "Disciples" or "Christians" which, though they had no creeds, had about as much uniformity in doctrine, organization, and practice as any other churches. It was natural, virtually inevitable, that this should be so. A group which finds itself sharply distinguished from other groups, even though its avowed purpose is union with them, can scarcely fail to develop

some mores of its own which are common to all its members and are its marks of distinction from the others. Since they prided themselves on being a scriptural people (with all "interpretations" and "human opinions" rigorously excluded), of course they found texts and apostolic precedents to sanction their practices. Each congregation strictly maintained its own autonomy. Only gradually did they come to the acceptance of conferences and conventions, and these only for voluntary co-operation and without any authority whatever; but some had misgivings even about this, and the seeds of division were here. They observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday, quoting "They came together on the first day of the week to break bread." The lay elders, not the preacher, presided at this service, as a testimony to their rejection of a privileged clergy. For several years they practiced and defended close communion, but they were ultimately saved from that practice by discovering the text, "Let each man examine himself, and so let him eat." Then the formula became, "We neither invite nor debar." They practiced the immersion of penitent believers as the only baptism, on the ground that this was neither an interpretation nor an opinion but a clear command of Christ, though most of the Christian world thought otherwise. Only gradually and to meet an obvious need did they come to have settled and regularly paid pastors. The more conservative element protested against what they called the unscriptural "one-man system" and stood for "mutual edification," but that system did not work very well. Fred Rowe, himself one of the conservatives, wrote: "Brethren, no system of edification can be scriptural if it doesn't edify." Another practice that became one of the marks of Disciple churches was that of ending every sermon with the invitation, asking those who would make the confession or join the church by letter to come forward, and to make the confession in the exact words of Matthew 16:16. Until relatively recent times there were some other characteristics which were common to nearly all Disciple churches though not entirely distinctive from all others. There was an atmosphere of lively informality and improvisation in worship services and a complete absence of the language of ritual. Ministers did not write and read their sermons and they did not (perish even the thought!) wear robes in the pulpit.

All this time, while developing these distinguishing characteristics and perpetuating most of them, and while growing into what they proudly and truly called "a great people," they were keeping alive their commitment to the cause of Christian unity and were preaching it at every opportunity.

There was a troublesome degree of ambiguity in this situation. Here was a recognizably distinct body of Christians with a name by which they could be denoted, in short, a denomination, but refusing to call itself a denomination because it believed that there ought not to be any denominations. It was unimpressed by the obvious truth that a group that is part of a larger whole cannot escape being a part by the plea that it does not believe that the whole ought to be divided into parts.

The tension between profession and practice can be stated in another way. The ostensible test to determine a candidate's qualifications for admission to a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was the question, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?" Only that. Nothing could be more ecumenical. The mysterious and metaphorical terms in this question were purposely left undefined. Any Christian or any convert to Christianity could give an affirmative answer. Were they not then offering the perfect platform on which all Christians could find full fellowship and the whole church could be united if all the denominations would only agree that this was enough? Indeed they were. But, as is quite evident if one looks at the situation realistically, they themselves were demanding a good deal more. There was fine print in the contract. What the convert or the candidate coming from a Methodist or Presbyterian church was really (though not audibly) asked was: Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God? And do you believe that baptism is essential to the Christian state, and that only the immersion of a penitent believer is baptism? And do you repudiate as baptism any other form that may have been inflicted upon you in infancy under the name of baptism? And are you willing to live your religious life henceforth in a congregation having the kind of ministry, worship, and customs that are characteristic of "Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)"?

In effect, they were urging that all Christians unite on terms which included a considerable list of beliefs and practices which,



so far as most outside observers could see, were in the same category with the special peculiarities of other denominations as being one among many sets of interpretations of Scripture or inferences from them plus some group habits that fall within the area of a church's freedom to decide upon its own procedures. They were, in fact, inviting the denominations to unite on what they called "Our Position," which included a good deal more than simple loyalty to Jesus Christ.

This is not to be taken as a criticism of the leaders of the movement for guiding it into some practices which became distinctive and recognizable characteristics of it as a group. Such things are inevitable. They are an obstacle to union only in so far as the leaders and members of the group come to believe that the mores and practices to which their interpretations and predilections have led them are crystal-clear divine enactments as recorded in infallible Scripture "with no admixture of human opinion." A good deal of the tendency in this direction arose from the fact that Disciples received their original mind-set and had more than half of their history before there were in America even the faintest beginnings of critical study of the Bible to determine what kind of book it really is, and when the doctrine of the plenary inspiration and infallibility of the whole Bible—the one item of Catholic tradition which Luther and Calvin retained when they rejected all the rest—was the virtually undisputed belief of all Protestants.

Undoubtedly Disciples of Christ did become a denomination—a rather large one, and a good one. Its evangelistic zeal has been motivated by the desire to convert men to Christ more than by ambition to promote its own growth and prestige. Its missionary, educational, and benevolent work has been such as all good denominations engage in and has had the same high and unselfish motive. And, incidentally, it has grown in size and prestige. But also, whether or not this is paradoxical and inconsistent, it has kept its unity motive alive and, like the Springfield Presbytery, has expressed its readiness to "sink into union with the Body of Christ at large," though many loyal members would view that prospect with horror if it were at all imminent.

Disciples of Christ and Episcopalians were the only denomi-



nations that regularly had anything to say about unity in the nineteenth century. Each had a program that the others would not accept, but they kept the idea alive at least in the minds of their own people. The liberal Lutheran S. S. Schmucker published a union plan which met little response. Episcopalians started something, but with little immediate effect, with their Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886-88. A little later, in 1918, the Presbyterians sponsored a union conference that issued the Philadelphia Plan, which no denomination approved, not even their own. Disciples took prominent parts in the formation and the work of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, now the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. J. H. Garrison named it. Herbert L. Willett directed its Midwestern office. Edgar DeWitt Jones served a term as its president. C. C. Morrison was one of its strongest journalistic supporters. Jesse Bader was head of its evangelistic department, and Mrs. James D. Wyker of its women's department. Roy Ross, after being head of the International Council of Religious Education, became and still is (in 1961) General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. J. Irwin Miller, an eminent Disciple layman, has been elected (1961) as its president.

For the purposes of this book, it is unnecessary to recite in detail the activities in which Disciples of Christ have co-operated with other Christians. They are many and various—evangelistic, missionary, educational, and benevolent. No one with any knowledge of the facts would today think of them as an isolated people or as sectarian in spirit. Nor need the story of the modern ecumenical movement and Disciples' participation in it be retold.<sup>2</sup> It will be enough to make the barest mention of some salient facts already known.

The modern Ecumenical Movement is usually dated from the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910. No Disciple had any part on the program of that conference, though several were present as visitors. In October of that

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<sup>2</sup>For a fuller account of all these things, see *Christian Unity and Disciples of Christ*, by W. E. Garrison (Bethany Press, 1955). Reference may also be made to any of the publications of the Council on Christian Unity, 222 South Downey Avenue, Indianapolis 7, Indiana, and to the Responses on behalf of Disciples to the actions of the World Council in its assemblies at Amsterdam and Evanston.

year almost simultaneous initiatives were taken by the Episcopal General Convention meeting in Philadelphia and the Disciples Convention meeting at Topeka which led to the organization of the Faith and Order Movement with unity as its avowed objective. The other outgrowths of Edinburgh 1910 were: the Life and Work Conference, which merged with Faith and Order in 1948 to form the World Council of Churches; and the International Missionary Council, which now seems on the point of consolidating with the World Council of Churches at the New Delhi assembly in 1961. Peter Ainslie was president of that Disciples convention which helped to launch Faith and Order in 1910. When Dr. John R. Mott, in his opening address at the organization meeting of the World Council, listed its four founding fathers, the name of Peter Ainslie led all the rest. He was also the founding father of the Council on Christian Unity, known for many years as the Association for the Promotion of Christian Unity. Disciples have been active in every world conference on unity or co-operation since Edinburgh 1910. They have sounded their note and made their voices heard, not always winning agreement, but steadily gaining respect.

Disciples of Christ have contributed to the ecumenical movement some elements of value derived directly from one strain of their heritage. One of these is a certain simplicity of approach, because they have fewer vested interests to defend, whether institutional or theological, and are in the habit of believing, with an almost childlike trust, that unity is not only desirable but actually possible, even though the road to it may be long. Their conviction that the real nature of the church does not consist of its organization or ecclesiastical structure has been a helpful foil (and sometimes a shocking surprise) to those who think that a united church must have what they call "organic" unity (really meaning organizational) with one visibly integrated mechanism for its administration. Equally important, but often unwelcome, has been the insistence that a united church must have in it room for the widest doctrinal diversity, and that any attempt to unite all Christians upon a set of theological propositions agreed upon by the negotiators would be as divisive as creeds have always been when they

did not have behind them a persecuting power to enforce them and suppress dissent. If they have one word more important than all others to add to the ecumenical conversation, it is that unity will never be built upon either an integrated compromise polity (usually conceived as a slightly modified form of episcopacy, like the Church of South India), or a theological consensus agreed upon at some modern Nicaea, but can rest only upon the acceptance of Jesus as Lord.

If Disciples have contributed something of value to the ecumenical effort, they have also received much from it. They have gained a wider acquaintance and fellowship with Christians of many communions. Their "plea for union" has become less theoretical, more concrete and realistic. They see more clearly the dimensions of the problem. They have also gained some degree of theological sophistication so that they know what the theologians are talking about even when no agreement is in sight. They have, it may be hoped, acquired some modesty through a more vivid realization that they do not have all the biblical scholarship in the world, and perhaps not even the best. It has been impressed upon them as they have come into more intimate relations with the men of other communions that these men are not inferior to themselves in devotion to the truth or in loyalty to Christ. Those who have had the privilege of prolonged and fraternal conference with such men cannot have failed to reach the conclusion that identity of religious habits and opinions is neither possible nor necessary. The ecumenical experience has forced a reconsideration of the nature and requirements of that simple and essential Christianity which, as Disciples of Christ have always said in principle, must be the basis for the one church united in faith and love.

The destiny of Disciples will be determined chiefly by their decisions in respect to the issues presented by the ecumenical movement, and these decisions will depend greatly upon their willingness and ability to use the best of their heritage from the past in the interest of the present and the future.





## VIII

### *Our Destiny*

THE HISTORIAN is not licensed to practice prophecy. When the theme is destiny, attention is shifted from the past to the future. But when it is one's own future that is involved, one cannot profess the degree of disinterestedness that is proper and possible in a critical examination of the past. When our consideration is focused on the future of the movement represented by Disciples of Christ, our attitude toward it—mine and that of most of the prospective readers of this book—is not that of mere observers and neutral forecasters. We are involved in it as committed participants. Its destiny is our destiny. From this point the author can no longer maintain even so much of the fiction of detachment as in the preceding chapters. "The author" becomes "I" and Disciples of Christ are "we."

The value of knowing the past lies in the indispensable part it plays in understanding the present and in suggesting the ends toward which present efforts should be directed and providing resources for the drive toward those ends. Our heritage furnishes a treasury of available resources which we can use at our discretion. Our history suggests ends toward which we should move, but its suggestions are not mandatory. They are not always even clear because history does not move in straight lines but in curves and sometimes in sharp angles. We can say with substantial accuracy that the Mississippi River flows

south; yet in the course of its long journey from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico it flows at various places in various directions—north, south, east, and west. Only by following its whole course, or by getting as it were a bird's-eye view of the whole river on a map, can one be quite certain that its destiny lies to the south of its source. A mere century or two is too short a segment of the river of events that we call history to permit us, as observers and students of it, to gain any certainty as to the resultant direction and ultimate outcome of the whole.

Disciples of Christ have not constantly moved in one unvarying direction. Moreover, since they are a free people cherishing liberty of opinion, not all of them have been moving in the same direction at any one time, and some have moved faster than others. This complicates the problem of describing a future which would be a consistent projection of their past. It is easier to tell the *whence* than the *whither* of their movement; but the *whither*, though still indeterminate, is not altogether shrouded in mystery. As men of faith with some convictions about the relation of this movement's central aim to the will and purposes of God, we cannot rest our case solely upon the empirical process of observation and inference from the recorded facts of history. We must chart our course also, and chiefly, with reference to the values we cherish. Our spiritual kinship with those men whom we have been calling our fathers, and the validity of our lineage from them, must rest upon the consistency of our highest values with theirs. Otherwise they would not be our fathers. That consistency is not a complete identity. They held dear some things that mean little to most of us, and vice versa; and to the extent of this variance they are not altogether our fathers. There is nothing alarming or disloyal in that thought. We must not be misled by the metaphorical use of the word "fathers" and infer from it a degree of consanguinity and filial dependence that does not really exist. We owe them much, but we do not owe them slavish imitation or the kind of obedience that the patriarchal head of a nomad family can demand from his descendants to the third and fourth generation.

As we approach the question of our destiny, I am again reminded that the two words which appear so prominently in

these chapters, "heritage" and "destiny," have an almost unavoidable flavor of compulsion, predestination, and inescapable necessity. I have already attempted to free the word "heritage" from its deterministic connotation in so far as it is used in this discussion. Some kinds of inheritance are entailed upon the heirs, but a heritage of ideas and ideals is not. It must be accepted critically and selectively if at all.

"Destiny" is an even more ominous word. Permit a brief excursus on this theme. Myth and legend, poetic sentiment, some types of philosophy and theology, and modern science have conspired to persuade man that he is so enmeshed in a web of irresistible forces not of his making that he is borne along helpless to an end not of his choosing. The early Greeks had *Moirai*, Fate, whose decrees not even Zeus could thwart. The early Chinese had *Ming*, the Will of Heaven, a rather impersonal but not quite rigid control over the acts and fortunes of men. Hebrew and Christian thought sought an equilibrium, or at least a paradoxical synthesis, between the sovereignty of an all-powerful God and the freedom and responsibility of man. Job represents Jehovah as reminding man of his littleness and weakness even as compared with other creatures (Job chapters 39-41), while the Psalmist more boldly affirms man's moral stature and his superiority to all other creatures in spite of his apparent insignificance (Psalm 8).

The Moslem lays all responsibility on the will of Allah whether the event be great or small. If an empire crashes, he sees in it the working of Allah's will. Or if he agrees to meet you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock "if Allah wills" but does not appear until the middle of the afternoon, he is unembarrassed, acknowledges no fault, and makes no excuses. It is quite evident to him—and he thinks it should be to you—that Allah did not will for him to be on time. The Moslem heretic, Omar Khayyam, was orthodox enough on this point, though he reduced the irresistible will of Allah to an equally irresistible blind force, when he wrote:

With earth's first clay they did the last man knead,  
And then of the last harvest sowed the seed;  
Yea, the first morning of creation wrote  
What the last dawn of reckoning shall read.

The scientific mind, realizing that our world would be an unintelligible and uninhabitable chaos if there were not a dependable and generally predictable sequence of causes and effects, is tempted to say, and sometimes does say, that the entire cosmos, including us, is in the grip of such a principle of iron necessity. And the theologian, trying to draw logical inferences from his religious reverence for the infinite power of God, may be moved to declare, as the Westminster Confession of 1647 does (Chapter III, Section 1): "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatever comes to pass."

The affirmation of such rigid determinism, whether materialistic or theological, rests upon an extrapolation far beyond the range of any facts known by observation, research, or revelation. Man's moral experience denies it, and so also do his aesthetic appreciations, and indeed the whole evaluative aspect of his life. A musician has lately said that all art presupposes the existence of an element of chance in life and perhaps in the whole cosmic process. Some scientists have spoken of an element of chance in the physical world, such as the Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy, but there is little comfort in that for the man seeking room in which to exercise his moral freedom and his power of choice. Many things that we call chance are the precise results of complex causes too intricate or too minute for our observation, measurement, or control. Man as a moral being cannot live in the chinks and crevices of chance in an otherwise monolithic system so rigid in its causal sequences that a cross section of existence at any given moment was completely determined by the state of the cosmos at the preceding moment, and so on back, moment by moment, to the arrangement of atoms and electrons in primordial chaos as the original determiner of the entire future. What man's moral and aesthetic nature requires is neither utter rigidity nor chance but choice.

What this musician perhaps really meant to say was that the total scheme of things is not so rigid as to exclude some areas of freedom in which creative forces can be continuously operative and that men are the masters of some of these creative forces. Every artist knows that this is true. The artist as painter



spreads pigment on canvas and behold! something comes into existence that was not squeezed out of the tubes. The musician as creative artist, when, like Browning's Abt Vogler, "out of three sounds he frames not a fourth sound but a star," knows that the "star" is a new thing, the essential quality of which was not in the separate notes. This is not the operation of irresponsible chance any more than of mechanical predetermination, but is the escape of the human spirit from what would be, if there were no areas of freedom and creativity, the rigor mortis of a dead world. It should not, indeed, be called an escape, for man lives continuously on these two levels, or in these two realms—the realm of law and irresistible control by past causes and present conditions, and the realm of freedom and responsibility. The borderline between these two is never quite clearly defined, and the interrelations between them are complicated. The basic truth is that man uses the regularity and the approximate predictability of the sequence of effects from causes as the means for attaining his freely chosen ends.

This ancient but persistent question about freedom and necessity is really fundamental to any satisfactory consideration of the nature of destiny. It is not easy, and it may be not even possible, to find a formula which will include both the rigid causality that science seems to demand and the freedom of decision that is essential to man's moral responsibility. Perhaps both can be affirmed as valid within the limits of man's knowledge even if they cannot be reconciled theoretically. A very able physicist, in discussing some aspects of electronics, recently said in my hearing that, from some points of view and for certain purposes, an electron must be considered as a particle of matter, while from other points of view and for other purposes it must be regarded as a wave. Neither of these representations, he said, can be accepted as giving an accurate picture of the whole reality of the objective electron, but, though the two descriptions seem to contradict each other, both are necessary for the explanation of the observed phenomena and for the best understanding of electrons that science can now attain. This suggests that, if the nature of an electron is so complex as to require a description in these paradoxical terms, then it cannot be unreasonable to say that the nature and state of

man, who is much more complicated than an electron, permit and require for their description the recognition of some apparently contradictory elements. As a being conscious of moral responsibility and carrying the values of human personality, he must be free. As a finite creature set down in an "existential situation" and subject to the impact of hereditary and environmental forces, he is in a world of cause and effect as surely as are the stars in their courses.

Destiny partakes of this ambiguous character. It is what we make it—subject to conditions not of our making. This is a broad and general truth about destiny. It is true about the destiny of Disciples of Christ.

What destiny do we choose for ourselves in the light of our commitment to the cause of Christ, in the light of our heritage and history, and in the light of our best understanding of the needs and the possibilities of the church both now and in the future? It will be whatever we and those who come after us shall make it, subject to the limitations of our own wisdom and courage, the pressures of traditions and habits, and the realities of the "existential situation"—which means the facts of life. I would say that we stand at the parting of the ways, except that everybody is always in a very real sense at a parting of the ways. There are always decisions to be made. Still, some decisions are more crucial than others. It is true that Disciples of Christ are now facing one of those crucial decisions as to the end toward which they will direct their collective energies. There are apparently three possibilities:

1. We may become an even stronger and greater denomination than we are now, with a more closely integrated structure and a more clearly defined body of doctrine. This would enable us to deal with the other denominations on more equal terms in ecumenical conferences as these are directed toward agreement upon a solid body of doctrine and a generally acceptable form of organization as the basis for a united church, and in the meanwhile it would increase our prestige in the religious world. Is this the destiny we want?

2. We may merge with one or more congenial denominations. We have sometimes been reproached, by some of our own number, with having talked about union for a hundred and

fifty years but having never united with any other communion. We tried and failed to unite with the Northern Baptists. We were active in the much more comprehensive Greenwich Plan, but it broke down. Another opportunity, perhaps still more inviting, is now a live option. Would we be fulfilling our mission and destiny by sinking our identity in what would be, regardless of its name, not a united church but a merger of a few denominations?

3. We may continue to be ourselves, a recognizably distinct body so long as our special testimony is needed, improving our procedure as we grow wiser through improved scholarship and by comradeship with other Christians, and presenting to the world a pattern of unity with freedom and diversity and of efficiency through responsibility and voluntary co-operation.

Disciples of Christ have, I think, two objectives—one proximate, one ultimate—toward which they should direct their course. These may be regarded as two phases of our destiny, or as marking the goals of two stages in progress toward what I hope we all regard as our single ultimate destiny. The proximate goal is to become a strong denomination, efficient in doing as much as we can of the proper work of the church in evangelism, in education, in benevolence, and in the application of Christianity in the lives of individuals and in the social order. The ultimate goal is to disappear as a denomination in the larger fellowship of a United Church. We need to be a strong denomination to make our voice heard and our influence felt in promoting the cause for which, as a people, we came into the world. We need ultimately to disappear as a separate denomination because the union of all Christians in the one church and the disappearance of all denominations is the cause for which we came into the world.

I make no apology for saying that the proximate aspect of our destiny is to become a strong denomination. Granted (as I hope it will be granted) that our history and principles commit us to the ultimate objective of an unbroken fellowship of all Christians in a completely United Church, it is also true that the attainment of this end is in the far distant future, and that in the meanwhile we have other work to do. There are anywhere from about 1,000,000 to nearly 4,000,000 of us,



depending on who compiles the statistics and for what purpose: 1,000,000 if we count only those who co-operate with the "International Convention of Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ)" and the agencies which report to it; nearly 4,000,000 if we include the members of all the churches which trace their lineage back to the movement initiated by Stone and the Campbells. All church statistics are notoriously unreliable on account of the difficulty in determining the number of members in each local church. We have an additional difficulty which is not experienced by the more tightly organized denominations. Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians know at least exactly what churches belong to their respective communions. We do not. What criterion can we apply? I do not know, and I doubt whether anyone knows. This is not altogether bad. We do not, and cannot, exclude any congregation that wants to be in, but we do apparently include a good many that want to be out.

It is good that we have no apparatus for excluding any congregation from the fellowship of Disciples of Christ. But if we included in our enumeration only those congregations which responded affirmatively to the one question, "Do you want to be listed in the *Yearbook* issued from the headquarters at Indianapolis as congregations of Disciples of Christ and to have your minister's name in its catalogue of ministers?" there would be a startling slump in our statistics. To adopt this procedure, however, would be taking a step inconsistent with our tradition and our principles. Who has a right to say that only those congregations which co-operate with some particular convention, or with some particular set of agencies, such as the United Christian Missionary Society and the others which report to the International Convention, are Disciples of Christ? When and if a united church is ever attained, do we expect that all congregations of Christians will make the U.C.M.S. their agency for missions, or will regard our International Convention as the place of their assembly, by delegates or otherwise? Certainly not. If, then, a united church ample enough in its dimensions to include all Christians is our ultimate objective, it would be a bad start to begin by eliminating from our fellowship those Christians who either co-operate through other agencies or do not co-operate at all.



The ultimate goal of a united church must determine the spirit and method of our approach to the proximate goal of denominational strength and unity. The church may have organizations, but the organizations do not make it the church. This is a fundamental Protestant belief. The earliest churches had only rudimentary local organization and none whatever on a wider scale. We above all should realize that the unity of the church does not consist in having a unified organization. Those who think that it does, and that otherwise a united church would not be sufficiently "visible," are aiming at a goal which is both unscriptural and impossible. Our testimony for unity should not be obscured by any act or attitude of ours in limiting our fellowship to those who co-operate through our agencies.

It may be very properly and plausibly remarked at this point that the question is not of our excluding those who will not co-operate but of their refusing to be regarded as part of what some of them scornfully call "the Disciple denomination." Very well. That is their privilege, but it is their act, nor ours. They are then another denomination whether they admit it or not. We should still hold them within the circle of our Christian concern and affection, and co-operate with them, as we do with other denominations, to the limit of their acceptance. This being the case, those Disciples who have a sufficiently common body of convictions and program of action must make ourselves a strong denomination if we are to do our share of the work which Christians are under obligation to do in the world and sound our note for union with a voice strong enough to be audible above the tumult and the shouting of a turbulent world and a divided church.

This requires that we who say that we believe in co-operation should support the agencies more generously than ever since these are our most efficient agents for doing the work we all want done, and that we should find ways of making our organization more effective even at the sacrifice of some of our cherished congregational independence if that is necessary, and for developing an educated and responsible ministry for our churches.

There is nothing new about such urgency for the increase

of our denominational strength, though that is not the way in which it has usually been stated. We have always been anxious to increase our numbers, strengthen our institutions, enhance our prestige, and extend our influence. This is nothing to be ashamed of and we should do all these things more than ever. We will understand better what we are actually doing if we call it what it actually is—increasing our denominational strength. If we recognize this as what it is, if we remember that this is only one of the two objectives we have in view, and if we do not forget that this short-range objective is the means of advancing toward our long-range objective, we can escape the ignoble fate of becoming merely complacent sectarians. Whatever we do with a view to making progress toward the short-range objective of becoming a great and efficient denomination must be so conceived and administered that it will not become a hindrance to making progress toward our long-range objective, which is that this denomination shall, in Barton Stone's words, "die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large."

This is perhaps the most important point in my argument. If it is agreed that it is part of our duty to become what I am calling a strong denomination—that is, a body of Christians with such spiritual and institutional vigor as to enable us to survive and flourish as long as our separateness can serve a good purpose, to perform a share of the common Christian task in proportion to our strength and numbers, and propagate the central idea that brought us into being—then it is of crucial importance that we do not solidify ourselves into the kind of denomination whose strength or whose exclusiveness can be an obstacle in the way of advancing toward our ultimate goal, which is the disappearance of all denominations in the one church. We could do that by developing denominational pride along with denominational strength. We could do it by regarding as alien to our fellowship those who, for reasons that seem good to them but not to us, do not co-operate with the agencies through which we who call ourselves "co-operative" do co-operate. We could do it by maintaining conditions of fellowship in "our" churches which exclude any persons whom we ourselves acknowledge to be Christians and within the membership of *the* church.

We could nullify our message for the unity of the whole church by setting the seal of official sanction upon some set of theological formulations which would be supposed to "tell the world where we stand" doctrinally. Beyond the affirmation of loyalty to Christ and the acceptance of his lordship as the bond of unity among Christians, nobody can tell the world where we stand, because we do not all stand on the same theological ground. There is almost as much theological diversification among Disciples as there is in the whole body of American Protestantism. This diversification has tended to increase as more and more Disciples have emerged from the state of theological naïveté which characterized our leaders in earlier days, and it will probably increase still more in the future. This gives Disciples an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate to the world by a concrete example that it is possible for a wide variety of doctrinal views to coexist peacefully and fraternally within one fellowship of Christians. Our central thesis is that this kind of unity with freedom and diversity can be projected on a larger scale which will include all Christians, and that no other kind of unity is either possible or desirable. Meanwhile, as to where we stand, let us stand on a platform as broad as that upon which we think a united church ought to stand.

I will join heartily in saying that all Christians and especially all ministers ought, within the limits of their ability, to deepen, broaden, clarify, and enrich their theological concepts, and so to move toward a better understanding of what they really believe. This is the way toward a more mature religion. It is a very different thing—and this I would deny and resist—to say that every communion, including ours, ought to put forth its own doctrinal statement to "tell the world where it stands." This would hinder the development of intelligent and independent theological thinking by individuals within the communion; it would present a false picture to the world by representing as a general consensus what is only the personal opinions of those who wrote it and those who could be persuaded to vote for it as embodied in a convention resolution; and it would block the road toward unity with other communions.

I cannot state my own position more clearly than by quoting with entire approval the following lines from an article entitled "The Nature of Protestant Disunity," by Charles Clayton Morrison in the issue of the *Christian Century* for March 9, 1960:

The present writing will affirm three theses: (1) that the nature of our disunity is not found in our theological or ecclesiological differences, but *solely in our erecting and maintaining sectarian walls around our particular doctrines*; (2) that the doctrinal differences in evangelical Protestantism, so long as they last, can coexist in one church without straining its unity or coercing the conscience of any believer; and (3) that the way to end Protestant sectarianism is for the denominations to *cease being churches*.<sup>1</sup>

The leaders of the ecumenical movement, especially those who are most active in the Faith and Order Commission, are constantly deploring the "sin of division," and resolutions of that commission have repeatedly summoned the Christian world to repentance for that sin. Other resolutions supported by the same men have repeatedly asserted that there is no sin in having diverse theological and ecclesiological views, many of which are in themselves innocent and praiseworthy. They are even described sometimes as resulting from "diverse workings of the Holy Spirit." The diversity is the actual cause of the division. Then, I ask you, if sinful division is based on nonsinful diversity, where exactly is the locus of the sin, and what is the specific sin of which the Christian world ought to repent? Genuine repentance includes both a godly sorrow for a sin and a sincere effort to correct it. But how can one make a serious effort at correction unless one knows definitely what the sin is? If the sin does not consist in having the diversity of views upon which the divisions are based, it must consist in making the statements of these diverse doctrines the banners and slogans of the various "churches" which put them forth and thus inevitably making them walls of separation.

To any Disciple who has got beyond the naïve assumption that we have an indisputably inspired and authoritative pattern of doctrine, polity, and practice to which all other Christians

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must conform, if there is ever to be unity among them, it should be obvious that the best contribution Disciples of Christ can make to the cause of unity is to give an object lesson of the practicability of a united fellowship of Christians without the unanimity of thought and action in regard to all the things concerning which disagreement has for centuries been treated as ground for division among Christians.

To make that contribution is the destiny toward which our heritage points if we understand it rightly. It does not point that way if we consider ourselves bound by the details of the thinking and practice of our fathers. What is our living and effective heritage from them? It is their system of values, not the means by which they sought to realize and objectify those values. Ideas, vocabularies, and specific programs are means for the realization of values under the limitations imposed by time, place, and circumstance. They are conditioned by the cultural level and the intellectual equipment both of those who speak and act and of those among whom they act and to whom they speak—in short, by the total human situation in which men of power and insight sound their note and do their work. So it was with our fathers. So it will be with us. As the human situation changes (and it always does), ideas, phrases, and programs must also change if the values which they once effectively implemented are not to be discredited as obsolete along with their antiquated vehicles. This is the substance of the poet's saying that "time makes ancient good uncouth." Good ends, fundamental and eternal values never become uncouth. Good means, good ideas, good methods of doing what needs to be done at the time do become uncouth and so may become an incubus upon the very cause they once served.

Christianity is always having to learn that lesson afresh from generation to generation. It usually learns it the hard way, by trying to eternalize what is essentially transitory—as Peter wanted to "build here three tabernacles" on the Mount of Transfiguration and make permanent what was necessarily a temporary incident. The church has too often treated what should have been a milestone on the road of progress as though it were a terminal monument bearing infallible truth inscribed

upon it, and has thereafter fought a losing battle against those free spirits who insist upon moving forward to new conquests of truth. A losing battle? The battle against the freedom of man's mind and spirit, and for obscurantism and sectarianism in religion, has to some extent been a losing battle in the past. It is an act of faith to predict that it will be so in our time and in the future. I have that faith even though it is not firmly grounded on statistical evidence. Perhaps statistical evidence, even when it is favorable and when it covers a century or two, is not the firmest ground for faith in the far future.

Our heritage from the founding fathers of our movement, when accepted critically and selectively, points toward a noble destiny. That destiny, as I see it, is to become increasingly a strong body of devoted and intelligent Christians, carrying their share of the common responsibility that rests upon all Christians, united by such ties as may hereafter unite all Christians, and, in a future beyond our calculation but not beyond the reach of our faith and hope, losing their distinctive identity by "sinking [or I would say rising] into union with the Body of Christ at large."

This is our destiny—but ours only if we accept it and work intelligently toward its achievement







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